Presented to Lt. J. K. Morris.
on his visit to Dalton Field
Albany. Head office of K.F.B.T.O

May 11th 1946.

R. Rogerson
Gp Lt

THE BUILDERS'

HISTORY

by

R. W. POSTGATE

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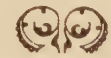
ROBERT OWEN

From an engraving by Ryall after the picture by W. H. Brooke, A.R.H.A.,
1834.

THE BUILDERS' HISTORY

by R. W. POSTGATE



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OF BUILDING TRADE OPERATIVES
London, 1923

By the same Author :

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Labour Publishing Company. 3*s.* 6*d.*

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PREFACE

IN the preparation and writing of a work such as this History of the Building Trades two methods are available. One of these would be to entrust the History to an old member of a union concerned, who would write up reminiscences, compile a list of dates and names, and extract portions of Chairmen's addresses to Annual Conferences. This would produce a souvenir for members—not a History. It would most likely lead to undue emphasis in favour of one particular union; stressing division rather than common interest in a common struggle. The other method is the one we have chosen, and the result is a History, not only of all the unions in the industry, but also of those unions in relation to the rest of the workers. This has meant entrusting the work to a writer entirely familiar with the methods of historical research, with a result of the value of which the reader will be able to judge.

An enormous amount of careful research has been done by the author. The mere list of important books that had to be read (and they were not all by any means) occupied eighteen quarto pages of manuscript. The task was difficult, and that it has been so successfully accomplished speaks favourably for our choice in Mr. R. W. Postgate, a scholar of wide attainments and reputation. As we believed would be the case, the History has been thoroughly well done, and we are proud to present to the working-class movement a skilfully built, and, indeed, enthralling story of trade union enterprise and vicissitude.

The idea of producing a comprehensive History of the Building Trades originated with the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers, who desired a work of the kind for use in its educational scheme. The National Federation took it over in order that all branches might bear equal responsibility. The work belongs to the whole industry, but its original character has not been changed; its aim is to provide a further and much-needed weapon in the day-to-day struggle.

In these days of " fair-weather trade unionism " and craft jealousies it is salutary to have the fact brought to mind that as long past as ninety years ago there was a united society for all the building workers. This book tells how that unity was won—and lost. It tells of extreme revolutionary periods and equally extreme conservative periods in the history of the building trades. Above all, we learn of the appalling results of non-unionism not only to the unorganised trades themselves, but to workers in other industries. No man unconvinced or half-convinced can read on and still doubt where his interest and duty lie.

D. MERSON
SIDNEY TAYLOR
S. SIGSWORTH
J. WALSH
HUGH M'PHERSON
GEORGE HICKS
GEORGE WADDELL
R. COPPOCK
GEO. HAINES

Emergency Committee of the National Federation of Building Trades Operatives.

INTRODUCTION

THE history of British building trade unions is a remarkable field for the sociologist, the student and the historian. In many ways the building trades have been typical of the British working class as a whole. It is true that there is no " women's labour question " in the building industry, but nearly every other problem that has troubled the British worker has arisen also in the building trades. The operative builders were once the vanguard of revolution, the strongest section of the militant unionists ninety years ago. They have been also the most conservative section, fighting for the dominance of the Liberal Party and led by an Under Secretary of State. Craft antagonisms have been let develop to their fullest extent, and have been fought by an industrial unionist movement of the most uncompromising kind. The experiments in self-employment, connected with the Guild, and in constitutionalism, connected with the " Parliament," are also best studied in this industry.

The task of writing this book, though pleasant, has not been easy. The student searching for material finds that building trade union documents are sharply divided about the year 1860. The first half is a devastated area, the second is a jungle. From 1800 to 1860 the documents are rare and vague. Of the Operative Builders' Union just one circular remains, to be turned over and over again and studied till the last hint of information is extracted, like juice from a sucked orange. Contemporary papers have to be searched : pamphlets sought out : even old letters have to be read. One must travel up and down the country, consulting libraries and burrowing in union offices.

But if the work is difficult, it is also interesting. It is only in this period that it is really possible to make new discoveries—even to find a national union that has disappeared and been utterly forgotten. Two such have been "bagged" here; at least, I believe, such as they are, they are first mentioned here. The General Representative Union of Sawyers is little more than a name, but the old Operative Plumbers and Glaziers, which paid its officers in beer, is a specimen to delight any collector. After 1860 the problem is different. Material abounds: every union has its annual and quarterly or monthly report, sometimes even, as with the Stonemasons, its vast and verbose *Fortnightly Return*. Nearly ten million words issued by the two masons' societies remain to satisfy the student's hunger. There is also the vast later literature outside union offices. Now it is difficult to see the wood for the trees; to select the valuable matter from the vast aggregation before one; to make a significant story of a mass of rubbish. How far this has been done, the pages of this book must show.

In writing it, I have received the greatest assistance from everybody I have approached. Mr. and Mrs. Webb in 1894, perhaps jestingly, gave advice to those about to interview trade union officials, warning them of the difficulty of their task and urging them particularly always to agree at once with whatever opinion was expressed by the official, lest worse befall. (Preface to *Industrial Democracy*.) I have not found such circumspection necessary. From among the many trade union officers who have assisted me, I should like particularly to thank, in Glasgow, Mr. Daniel Baird, Mr. William Cross, Mr. W. Shaw, Mr. H. Macpherson and Mr. J. F. Armour; in Manchester, Mr. Fred Brindley, Mr. J. Walsh, Mr. G. Haines, Mr. A. G. Cameron and Mr. S. Higgenbotham; in Liverpool, Mr. John Hamilton, who is preparing also a syllabus upon this book for

use by Labour College classes ; in London, Mr. John Burns for the use of his remarkable library, Mr. A. H. Telling, Mr. D. Haggerty, Mr. W. Kennedy, Mr. Lachlan MacDonald, Mr. John Batchelor, and Mr. John Lamb. I would like also to mention the assistance I received from the Labour Research Department files, from Mr. T. W. Mercer in inspecting the Co-operative Union records, from all those mentioned in section 9 of my Bibliography, from the officials of the A.U.B.T.W., particularly Mr. Jordan and Mr. Gregory, and not least from the advice and criticisms of Mr. George Hicks.

Like any other investigator, I am deeply indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Webb's *History of Trade Unionism*. In the pages of this history my most frequent reference to them is in criticism or correction. In case this should give a false impression, I wish to record my admiration for that work as a whole, and in particular for its earlier parts. To go through the whole history of the period in detail with the book beside one, as I have had to do, is to subject it to the severest possible test. It is absolutely inevitable that certain lesser errors should thus be discovered. But the test as a whole has merely served to confirm and heighten my opinion of the learning, good sense and industry which have gone to the making of that remarkable book.

I should add that authorities quoted in the body of the work are not referred to by their full titles but by abbreviations whose explanation should be sought in the Bibliography.

R. W. Postgate

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following list of books and authorities attempts to be exhaustive and complete so far as the building trades are concerned. I have made no more than an indication of works of importance on the general history of trade unionism. The names and letters in square brackets [ ] are the short titles used for reference purposes in the body of the book.

1. *GENERAL WORKS*, obtainable in most reference Libraries.

S. & B. Webb — *History of Trade Unionism.* (References to 1920 ed.) [Webb.]

do. do. — *Industrial Democracy*, 2 vols. [Webb, I.D.]

The first of these two works is a work upon which all future Trade Union history must be based. It is what the *Origin of Species* is in another sphere. It will have to be corrected in details here and there, and whole sections may be questioned later, but the pioneer work which the Webbs did cannot be undone, and future history must necessarily be written generally on the lines that they have laid down. The edition to be used when possible is the 1911 edition : the later edition lacks the bibliography and the additions are not so good. *Industrial Democracy* is important for our purpose, mainly because of the illustrative matter in it.

J. L. & B. Hammond — *The Village Labourer*
The Town Labourer [Hammond, T.L.]
The Skilled Labourer

These three books make up together a history of the English working class between 1760 and 1830. They are not merely scholarly, they are also finely written. For us, unfortunately, they are only of use as giving the general history of the period, as no reference whatever is made to any of the building trades in any of the three volumes.

The undermentioned books are of value for the special subjects in which they deal :—

A. W. Humphrey — *Robert Applegarth* [Humphrey.]

Henry Broadhurst — *Story of his Life* [Broadhurst.]

W. J. Davis — *History of the Trades Union Congress* [Davis.]

F. Podmore	*Life of Robert Owen*	
R. Owen	*Life of Owen*	[Owen.]
R. W. Postgate	*The Workers' International*	[International.]
Howard Evans	*Sir Randal Cremer*	
George Shaw	*Revived Guild Action* (for the registration of Plumbers), 2nd edition	[Shaw.]
N. B. Dearle	*Problems of Unemployment in the London Building Trades*, 1908	[Dearle.]
——	*The Industrial Council for the Building Industry* (Garton Foundation)	[Garton.]
F. Engels	*The Condition of the English Working Class in* 1844.	[Engels.]
G. Wallas	*Life of Place.*	[Wallas.]

There is another *Life of Owen*, by Lloyd Jones, but neither it nor Podmore's is good. The best short account of Owen's views by himself is, I think, *Observations upon the Effects of the Manufacturing System*, 1818 (8276 f.1. in the British Museum). Certain of the documents dealing with the Builders' Union of 1833 have been published in R. W. Postgate's *Revolution from* 1789 *to* 1906. [Revolution.] The relevant chapters in M. Beer's *History of British Socialism* should also be consulted. [Beer.] Baernreither's *English Associations of Workingmen*, dealing with friendly societies, and G. Howell's *Conflicts of Capital and Labour* [Howell] are no longer of great value. Howell's *Trade Unionism, New and Old* is a piece of special pleading against the new unionism of the nineties, of considerable interest. [Howell, T.U.] Perhaps the best introduction to a study of trade union records is a series of articles, with extracts, from an old minute-book of the Steam Enginemakers, by Fred Shaw, published in the *Plebs* of June, July, September, 1922.

One book which does not fit itself into any classification, but which is, of course, absolutely essential, is Robert Tressall's novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*.

2. *DOCUMENTS IN TRADE UNION OFFICES*

A.—AMALGAMATED UNION OF BUILDING TRADE WORKERS

(1) OPERATIVE STONE MASONS

(*a*) *Annual Accounts and Audits*
Bound, from 1843 to 1918. [O.S.M. Accounts.]

(*b*) *Fortnightly Returns*, 1843–1910. *Journal* 1910–1920. 65 vols. [O.S.M. Returns.]

(*c*) *Fortnightly Returns and Accounts*. Duplicate set of much older date, beginning with MS. returns of 1834, and accounts of October, 1833. These are bound up together with other matter and go up to 1851. Four volumes. [O.S.M. Old Returns.]

(*d*) *Miscellaneous Documents:* Loose and at back of (*c*), including "Making Parts Book," Circular of O.B.U. of 1833, black lists and other matter as indicated in the text. [O.S.M. Misc.]

(*e*) *Warrington S.M. Minute Book*, 1832. Loaned for the purpose of writing this history. [Warrington.]

(*f*) *Rope Box:* containing rope and details of attack on Richard Harnott. [Ropebox.]

(*g*) *Rules*. Bound 1840 onwards. 1836 loose. [O.S.M. Rules.]

(2) OPERATIVE BRICKLAYERS' SOCIETY

(*a*) *Annual and Quarterly Reports*, 1862–1919 [O.B.S. Annual & Quarterly.]

(*b*) *Monthly Circular*, 1862–1918. 33 vols. [O.B.S. Monthly.]

(*c*) *Odd Matter*. [O.B.S. Various.]

(*d*) *Rules*, 1871–1918. [O.B.S. Rules.]

(3) MANCHESTER UNITY

(*a*) *Rules*, 1844 and 1867, 1875 and various dates to 1914. [Unity Rules.]

(*b*) *Various Circulars*, etc., loose, 1889–1910 [Unity Various.]

(*c*) *Financial Reports*, 1844–1846. [Unity Accounts.]

(*d*) *Reports*. 1868–1886, monthly; 1886–1919 quarterly. 52 vols. [Unity Reports.]

(*e*) *Monthly Trade Journal*, 1902–1921. 20 vols. [Unity Journal.]

(*f*) *A Reply to the Circular and Refutation of the Falsehoods Issued by the Imposters and Renegades of Liverpool and Bolton*, 1855. [A Reply.]

(4) GLASGOW BRICKLAYERS UNITED PROTECTING ASSOCIATION

(*a*) *Membership Book*, 1832–1846. Now in possession of Mr. D. Young, 98 Westmuir Street, Parkhead, Glasgow. Contains also scraps of minutes [Glasgow Bricklayers.]

B.—BUILDING AND MONUMENTAL WORKERS' ASSOCIATION OF SCOTLAND

(1) SCOTTISH UNITED OPERATIVE MASONS

Fortnightly Returns, June, 1854–November, 1910. [S.O.M. Returns.]

Monthly Journal, 1911–1921. [S.O.M. Journal.]

Annual Reports, 1871–1905, 1911–1921. [S.O.M. Annual.]

Letterbooks, various dates, as also C.C. minutes.

(2) OPERATIVE MASONS AND GRANITE WORKERS, ABERDEEN

Journal, October, 1915–June, 1916. Containing *History* of the Society, by J. A. Bowie. Mr. Bowie also kindly lent me his notes. Books of the union are in Aberdeen : I was not able to consult them for this work. [Bowie.]

Journal, October, 1909. Article, "21 Years of our History."

C.—AMALGAMATED SOCIETY OF WOODWORKERS

(1) AMALGAMATED SOCIETY OF CARPENTERS AND JOINERS

(*a*) *A.S.C.J. Monthly Reports* from 1861 to 1922. [A.S.C.J. Monthly.]

Note particularly in 1920, pp. 254, 280, 363, 412, 459, 501, 658; in 1921, pp. 113, 289, 509, 567; in 1922, pp. 36, 96, 309, 412, which contain

(*b*) Mr. S. Higgenbotham's " Notes on the History of our Society." [Higgenbotham.]

(2) GENERAL UNION OF CARPENTERS AND JOINERS

(*a*) *G.U. Monthly Reports*, 1863 onwards. Most incomplete. [G.U. Monthly.]

(*b*) *G.U. Annual Reports*, 1866 onwards. Incomplete. [G.U. Annual.]

(*c*) *G.U. Rules*, 1863 and later. [G.U. Rules.]

MS. records as early as 1832 existed of the G.U. when the Webbs wrote their *History* (p. 125). These have now disappeared.

(3) A. S. W.
Various.
Including : Explanation of G.U. Emblem, Rules of the Running Horse Society, Letters of Mossman of the same, Balance sheet of the Short-time movement of 1872, *Do.* of the late strike (1860), Striking Features in the Life of George Potter, Officers' Charges of the G.U. (1845).
[A.S.W. Misc.]

(4) PRESTON JOINERS' SOCIETY
(*a*) *Cash Book* and Membership Lists, 1807–1839.
[Preston Cashbook.]

(*b*) *Minute Book*, 1866–68.

D.—NATIONAL AMALGAMATED SOCIETY OF OPERATIVE HOUSE AND SHIP PAINTERS AND DECORATORS

(1) AMALGAMATED SOCIETY OF HOUSE DECORATORS AND PAINTERS (" LONDON AMALGAMATED ")
(*a*) *Annual Reports*, 1873–1900 [L.P. Annual.]
(*b*) *Monthly Circular*, 1891–1900. (See also under BRITISH MUSEUM.) [L.P. Monthly.]

(2) MANCHESTER ALLIANCE OF OPERATIVE HOUSE PAINTERS, from 1870, called GENERAL ALLIANCE
Half-Yearly Reports, 1866–1870.
Quarterly Reports, 1870–1885.
Annual Meetings, 1872–1880.
Annual Reports, 1881–1885.
[Alliance.]

(3) NATIONAL AMALGAMATED SOCIETY OF OPERATIVE HOUSE AND SHIP PAINTERS AND DECORATORS
Delegate Meetings. Quarterly and Annual Reports, 1886 to date. 28 vols. [Painters.]
I am glad to say that the Executive of the society has passed a resolution to the effect that any *bona fide* student desiring to consult these records will be given facilities.

E.—OPERATIVE PLUMBERS AND DOMESTIC ENGINEERS

(1) HEAD OFFICE
(*a*) *Quarterly Returns*, 1867–1922. [O.P.Q.R.]

(*b*) *Monthly and Annual Returns*, 1905–1922 (imperfect).
[O.P. Monthly or Annual.]
Rules, Reports of Delegate Meetings, Circulars, etc., bound up at odd intervals in both of above.
[O.P. Rules, D.M., Various.]

(2) OPERATIVE PLUMBERS, MANCHESTER NO. 2 LODGE.
Records of the old Operative Plumbers' and Glaziers' Society (O.P.G.)

(*a*) "*Minute Book for Plumbers*," 1837–1851.
[Plumbers' Minutes.]

(*b*) *Minute Book*, 1850–1851.

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(*d*) Plumbers' Cashbooks, (1) 1831–1836; (2) 1844–1852.
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(3) UNITED OPERATIVE PLUMBERS' ASSOCIATION OF SCOTLAND

(*a*) *Annual Reports*, 1883–1919. [Scottish O.P.]

F.—SCOTTISH NATIONAL OPERATIVE PLASTERERS' FEDERAL UNION

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G.—AMALGAMATED SOCIETY OF WOODCUTTING MACHINISTS

(*a*) *Reports* : 1873 to 1922. [Sawyers' Reports.]

H.—NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF OPERATIVE PLASTERERS

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I.—BUILDERS' LABOURERS : *The "Altogether" Builders' Labourers and Constructional Workers, The Workers' Union, General Workers, etc.*

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J.—NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BUILDERS' LABOURERS (now the "Altogether") HULL LODGE.

Hull Building Trades Federation, *Minute Book*, 1896–1902.

Hull Building Trades Federation, Joint Committee, *Minutes*, 1908–1918.

Hull Builders' Labourers Trade Society, *Minutes*, 1890–1903. (Lent by Mr. R. Lancaster, of Hull.)

K.—NATIONAL BUILDERS' LABOURERS AND CONSTRUCTIONAL WORKERS' SOCIETY (formerly United Builders' Labourers' Union)

Annual and Quarterly Reports, 1902, 1904–1922. [B.L.]

3. *BOOKS IN THE MANCHESTER PUBLIC REFERENCE LIBRARY*

Remarks on the Struggle between the Master and Journeyman Builders, 1833. [Remarks.]

Report of the Proceedings of the Master Builders, 1846. [Master Builders '46.]

Brief History of the Proceedings of the Operative Builders' Trades Unions, 1833. [Brief History.]

An Impartial Statement of the Proceedings of the Members of the Trades Union Societies, Liverpool, 1833. [Impartial Statement.]

The Trade Union Bill, 1871 : *A Letter from Mr. W. P. Roberts to Mr. George Potter and others.*

4. *BOOKS, ETC., IN THE MITCHELL LIBRARY, GLASGOW*

W. MacDonald (Hon. Sec. of the Manchester Alliance of House Painters) : *The True Story of Trade Unions...* reprinted from the *Manchester City News*, 1867. [MacDonald.]

The Herald to the Trades Advocate and Co-operative Journal, Glasgow, September, 1830–May, 1831. Published by the delegates of the United Trades of Glasgow. (Edited by Alexander Campbell.) [Herald.]

5. *BOOKS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM* (with Catalogue numbers)

A.—PLACE DOCUMENTS

Guardbook 50. First and Second Reports of the Select Committee on Artizans and Machinery (annotated) 1824. "Hendon." [Select Committee.]

Guardbook 53 (E. 1) Various Cuttings. "Hendon." [Place B.]

Add. MSS. 27798. [Place A.]
" " 27799. [Place C.]
" " 27801. [Place D.]
" " 27803. [Place E.]
" " 27805. [Place F.]

B.—JOURNALS, dealing with 1832–34.

The Pioneer (James Morrison). [Pioneer.]

The "Destructive" and Poor Man's Conservative. (Bronterre O'Brien) PP3755b [Destructive.]

The Man. (R. E. Lea.) PP3755 [Man.]

The Poor Man's Guardian. (H. Hetherington). PP3754 [P.M.G.]

The Crisis (Robert Owen and J. E. Smith) PP3390 [Crisis.]

The True Sun (daily) (H. Cartwright). N.R. [True Sun.]

C.—OTHER MATTER

Builders' Price Books. Of various dates, to 1922.

Early History of the Painting Trade in London : A paper by W. A. D. Englefield : in the *Journal of Decorative Art*, June, 1919. [Englefield.]

Newcastle : *Men's Permanent Societies.* These include rules of some early building trade unions. 8275 bb 2–5 [Newcastle.]

R. Henshaw : *Notes on labour in the Building Trade of London*, from 1800 to 1892. 08282 h 57 [Henshaw.]

Character, etc., of Trades Unions. C. Knight, 1834. C.T.279.6 [Knight.]

Statement of the London Master Builders, 1834 8245 e 45.

The Building Strike : Case of Potterabout versus Wollop. 1859 8282 d 31 [Wollop.]

A. Whitehead : *Live and Let Live*, the Builders' dispute in London, 1859. 8282 a 78 (2)

London Operative Bricklayers: Report of the Dispute, 1862. With first 11 numbers of the *Trade Circular*. Duplicate of Monthly Reports in A.U.B.T.W. Offices. 8277 d 17.
Trades Societies and Strikes: Report . . . of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science. Page 52 onwards deals with the lock-out of 1859. 8276 d 53
George Potter: *The Labour Question*, a letter to the Employers on behalf of the building trades, 1861. 8277 d 17
[Potter.]
Manchester: A full report of the Inquiry into . . . outrages by trade unions. 1867. 8285 bbb 12
[Manch. Report.]
The Builders' Lock-out, 1872, by "A Clerk of the Works." 8277 a 34 (3)
London Amalgamated Society of Painters, Rules, 1879. 8275 aa 4.
Scottish National Op. Plasterers' Federal Union, *Conference Reports*, 1891–94. 8275 dd [S. Plast. B.M.]

6. *HAMILTON COLLECTION.* Property of Mr. John Hamilton, Chairman, National Council of Labour Colleges.
   (1) Lock-out of 1914: Scrap book of Press Cuttings, O.S.M. circulars, etc.
   (2) Industrial Unionism and the B.W.I.U.:—
   Weekly Bulletin of the B.W.I.U., September 5, 1914, to July 16, 1915 (Nos. 14–16 missing).
   Solidarity. September, 1915, to June, 1916.
   File of B.W.I.U. Circulars, etc.; report of 1916 conference.
   Pamphlets: (*a*) *The Case for the B.W.I.U.*, by H. Hodge, Bill Binder and J. Hamilton. (*b*) *Industrial Unionism.*
   Minutes and other matter referring to the formative congress of 1914.
   Leaflets and circulars of the Provisional Committee for Consolidation. Press cuttings on same. [Hamilton.]

7. *JOHN BURNS COLLECTION.* Property of the Rt. Hon. John Burns.
   Minute Book of Building Trades Conference, 1858, kept by Potter (now presented to the A.U.B.T.W.).
   [1858 Minutes.]

The Beehive, 1862–1876. This is the fullest file known to exist. There is an imperfect file in the British Museum. Continued as the *Industrial Review*, 1877–78. (Now on loan at the Labour Research Dept.) 16 vols. [Beehive.]
Various: Cuttings, broadsheets, etc., dealing with the building trades. Of various dates from 1789 to 1922, mostly of the twentieth century. Including Speech of Broadhurst, 1878, Sentence on Journeymen Carpenters, 1789, numerous cuttings on dilution and after-war housing problem. [Burns Various.]

8. *ASSOCIATED CARPENTERS AND JOINERS.* This union is now merged in the A.S.W., and its records are lost, but Mr. William Shaw, secretary to the Glasgow Trades Council, was good enough to lend me some records which he had preserved :—

Annual Reports
Delegate Meetings
Monthly Reports
} 1894–1911, imperfect. [Associated Monthly, etc.]

9. *MANUSCRIPTS.* Letters and reminiscences, etc., sent to the author for use in this book. Deposited at the Labour Research Department.
Daniel Baird, J.P. (Gen. Sec. Scottish Plasterers): Notes of reminiscences covering the history of the Scottish building trades for the last forty-five years. [Baird.]
John Batchelor (late Gen. Sec. Operative Bricklayers' Society): Notes and reminiscences, additional to his remarks in the final O.B.S. Annual, 1919. [Batchelor.]
J. Beeston: Sketch of trade union organisation in the Plumbing trade in London from 1833 to 1880. [Beeston.]
Wm. Cross, J.P. (Gen. Sec. Amalgamated Slaters of Scotland): Notes on the history of the society, with Rules. [Cross.]
D. Haggerty (Gen. Sec. National Builders' Labourers' Society): Notes on past history of Builders' Labourers' Unions. [Haggerty.]
John Lamb (ex-Assistant Gen. Sec. N.A.O. Plasterers): Notes upon the history of the Association. [Lamb.]

F. Ruffell : Reminiscences of the London O.B.S. from 1853 to 1872. Incomplete notes of these only remain, as the information was verbal. [Ruffell.]

J. Walsh (Pres. N.A.S.O.H.A.S.P.A.D.) : Notes on "Robert Tressall." [Walsh.]

J. Whittingham : Letter on Manchester Unity, containing also notes on E. Coulson. [Whittingham.]

Robert Wilson (Gen. Sec. Amal. Slaters' and Tilers' P.S.) : Sketch of the history of the Society. [Wilson.]

10. *CO-OPERATIVE UNION RECORDS, MANCHESTER*

Miscellaneous Correspondence. Presented to the Union by G. J. Holyoake. This is a collection of some two thousand letters, mainly letters to Robert Owen, collected by him for use in his unfinished autobiography. Some extremely valuable matter is among the letters, together, of course, with much inferior stuff. The years of value to us are 1833 and 1834. [C. U.]

11. *BISHOPSGATE INSTITUTE REFERENCE LIBRARY* : George Howell Collection.

(1) *Minute Book and papers* of the First International. At the time of writing these have been taken away from the Library by the librarian and no one is allowed to see them, for any purpose. This is intended to be permanent.

(2) *Analysis* of above, with commentary by George Howell. The same remarks apply here. An exception was made in favour of the present author by the librarian, for the purpose of this work only.

12. *LABOUR RESEARCH DEPARTMENT, LONDON*

(*a*) F. Chandler : *History of the A.S.C. and J.*, 1910. I have not been able to find this elsewhere. [Chandler.]

(*b*) *Collection* of Trade Union reports and papers of various kinds. This is, perhaps, the best collection of modern trade union documents outside the Trade Union offices themselves. It does in no case* reach back for the building

*I now hear that Mr. A. H. Telling, Gen. Sec. of the N.A.O.P., has loaned a number of past reports going back into last century ; other unions outside the building trades have done the same.

trades beyond 1900, and generally there is little stuff before 1911. The following were not to be found elsewhere :—

Scottish Painters' Society Annuals 1913–1916.
Monthlies : odd numbers.

(Mr. Arch. Gardner, the Gen. Sec. of this Society, was unable to let me inspect his records when I was in Glasgow.)

Union of Building Trade Federations :
Annual Reports and E.C. Minutes, 1905, 1906, 1909.

Building Guild and Building Trades Parliament :
Large collection of leaflets, minutes, circulars, dealing with both these subjects. [L.R.D.]

13. *GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS*

Reports and evidence of the Select Committee on Artizans and Machinery, 1829. [Select Committee.]

Report, etc., of the Select Committee on the Combination Laws, 1825.

Report, etc., of the Select Committee on Trade Unions, 1838. [1838 Committee.]

General Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population, 1842.

Reports, etc., of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions, 11 volumes, 1867–1869. [1867 Committee.]

Reports of the Royal Commission on Labour Laws, 3 volumes, 1874–75.

Reports, etc., of the Royal Commission on Labour, 1891–94, 22 volumes. See particularly : Evidence, Group C., Vols. 2–3.

14. *OTHERS*

A pamphlet of great interest, of which I have seen no other copy, was lent me by Mr. G. D. H. Cole. *Report of the General Amalgamated Labourers' Union, containing a review of the strike and lock-out of* 1859–60 . . . *and of* 1872 . . . *together with a Summary of Speeches delivered by P. Kenney, General Secretary*, 1872. [Kenney.]

Some useful matter is to be found in a volume of Freemason history called *A Sketch of the Incorporation of Masons and the Lodge of Glasgow St. John*, by James Cruikshank, lent me by Mr. J. F. Armour. [Cruikshank.]

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS

EARLY BUILDING * MEDIEVAL ORGANISATION * THE FREEMASONS * THE FIRST TRADE CLUBS * APPEALS TO PARLIAMENT COMBINATION ACTS * DISGUISED UNIONS * FRIENDLY AND MORAL CHARACTER * BEER * LONDON ORGANISATION DUBLIN * PRESTON * ACTIVITIES OF CLUBS THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

1749–1823

BUILDING of all trades has perhaps the longest and least eventful history. Plasterwork is still to be found undamaged in the Egyptian pyramids that was completed certainly four thousand years ago, if not much earlier. Recent discoveries, moreover, have shown us that the principal tools that the plasterer used in those days were the same for practical purposes as those we use now. If to-day a competent member of the National Association of Operative Plasterers were to meet the ancient Egyptian worker who used those tools, he might not understand his language, but could work with him all day till sundown without suspecting that four thousand years lay between them.

Masons have sometimes dated the origin of their craft from the building of King Solomon's temple, while the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners used to place the figure of St. Joseph on their emblem. Although the story of the descent of masonic organisations from Hiram Abiff, the builder of the Temple, is no more than a story, the building trades workers have a moral claim

to even greater antiquity. For thousands of years the crafts of plasterwork, carpentry, masonry, bricklaying and tiling have been handed down from father to son, and the history of the trade is written all over the world, not in pen and ink, but in brick and stone and wood. In every age that has not been utterly barbarous and degraded, in which there has been some pleasure and colour in life for the workers, the builders have left their enduring monuments. Carpenters, masons and bricklayers have expressed the ideals and civilisation of their age as much and as well as writers, soldiers and statesmen. Stone and brick as well as manuscripts tell us of Greece and Rome. The craftsmen who built Battle Abbey and Trinity Great Gate in Cambridge have left as sure a record of their times as any medieval chronicler. The men who built these buildings, decorated them at their own will and carved their own fantastic gargoyles, had a joy in their work and a security of which their successors have been robbed. If the Bristol carpenter in 1336 only received 3d. a day and the mason 4d., wheat was selling at 3d. a bushel, a pig cost a 1d. and a fat goose 2d., and the craftsman was sure of his livelihood. The history of the building worker in these days is, because of its very calmness, unwritten: the building workers of those days passed away leaving what the historian calls "nothing" behind them, no written records—nothing but Magdalen College, Peterborough Cathedral, Conway Castle.

But we cannot look for the history of trade unions in the Middle Ages. There was no place for them at that time. "Industry was carried on under a system of enterprise at once public and private, associative and individual. The unit of production was the workshop of the individual master-craftsman, but the craftsman held

his position as a master only by virtue of full membership in his Craft Guild. He was not free to adopt any methods of production or any scale of production he might choose; he was subjected to an elaborate regulation of both the quantity and the quality of his products, of the price which he should charge to the consumer, and of his relations to his journeymen and apprentices. He worked within a clearly defined code of rules which had the object at once of safeguarding the independence, equality and prosperity of the craftsmen, of keeping broad the highway of promotion from apprentice to journeyman and from journeyman to master, and also of preserving the integrity and well-being of the craft by guarding the consumer against exploitation and shoddy goods." *

The stability of the trade and the normal progression of the worker from apprentice to journeyman and, with reasonable luck and average competence, from journeyman to master, prevented the growth of any class antagonism. Occasionally, of course, a combination of favourable circumstances might induce those workers in any given trades, who happened to be in the journeyman stage, to unite, and they might extract momentarily some privileges from their masters. For example, H. Luiff, of Lochwinnoch, in 1636 employed a number of " waars " (wallers) for erecting a " Houss at the Kirk " and " quhen al the waars had wroght 6 days, they geawe ower the woork, and wald not lay ane stane mo, except ane new prys quhilk I was forst to give them, 8 marks. And it pleised them not. Bot ewerie day of fyfteein I gaue them twa qwarts of eale qlk. was 4 Lib." But such combinations fell quickly to pieces, because each journeyman hoped soon to become a master, and

* G. D. H. Cole, in Renard's *Guilds in the Middle Ages*, xiii.

knew that whatever injuries he inflicted on the masters would soon be injuries inflicted on himself. What records there are of these combinations suggest that they occurred rather more frequently in the building trades than elsewhere. In 1361 an Act of Edward III abolished and rendered " null and void all alliances and covines of masons and carpenters" and ordered " that each such artificer shall be compelled to serve his master and do every work that to him pertaineth." * Such combinations outside the Guild's limits were already illegal by a statute of Edward I in 1305 (33 Edw. I, st. I), but it was presumably necessary to enact a special law to restrain the masons and carpenters. Similarly in 1425 Henry VI's government forbade the masons to hold any longer their " yearly congregations and confederacies made in their general chapiters assembled." (3 Henry VI, c. 1.) The tilers of Worcester in 1467 were ordered to " sett no parliament amonge them." †

Nevertheless, these are not the forerunners of our modern trade union. "Industrial oppression belongs to all ages, but it is not until the changing conditions of industry had reduced to an infinitesimal chance the journeyman's prospect of becoming himself a master that we find the passage of ephemeral combinations into permanent trade societies." † The conflict in medieval industry is not between employer and worker (though the signs of such a cleavage begin to appear towards the end in Guild records), but between craft and craft. The Painters' Company, for example, in 1626 took proceedings against various other trades for invading their province. These interlopers included

* 34 Edw. III, c. 9, in *Howell T. U.*, 36.

† Webb 6–8.

the "Plasterers, Bricklayers, Carpenters, Wyermakers, Boxmakers, Imbroydermakers, Turners, Joiners, Drummakers, Coachmakers, Virginallmakers, Plummers, Glasiers, Armourers and Hottpressers."* The medieval journeyman was far more interested in driving out interlopers from his craft than in worrying the master-craftsman. The differences in remuneration were not remarkable. For repairing the Tolbooth steeple in Edinburgh in 1500 the master masons received 10d. a week and the journeymen 9d.† Even if he remained for many years a journeyman (and not every apprentice married his master's daughter) the worker was in a different position from that of the modern operative. He was not liable to be turned adrift as soon as the particular job was over, or blacklisted by an employers' combination for his independence. It is not until the eighteenth century that we find anything more than ephemeral combinations of journeymen, and in the building trades there are indeed very few traces of them before 1800. It was in the eighteenth century that the capitalist system, as we call it, spread all over England and Scotland. The century was marked by the complete disappearance of the traces of the medieval guild system, and the appearance of large establishments in all trades, in which one master directed far more journeymen than could ever hope to become masters in their turn. The appearance of this class gave rise to trade unionism, which has no other basis than this cleavage between employers and employed.‡

* Englefield, 149, 150. † Cruikshank, p. 100. ‡ It should here be mentioned that the myth of an alleged connection between the medieval guilds and the Dublin trades unions was destroyed by the publication of the Webbs' *History* in 1894. See Webb, ch. i and Appendix.

In one building trade, there is faint evidence of an attempt by the oppressed journeymen to use the Guild for their own relief. The Painters' Company was divided into Livery and Yeomanry, the first being master-craftsmen and the second journeymen, working independently or for hire. The Court of the Livery gradually found the Yeomanry and its Wardens claiming greater powers and interfering with the government, even securing a share in the " searching " for bad work or illegal workers. This process was stopped by the suppression of the Court of Yeomanry altogether in 1659 and " after this the Yeomanry organisation gradually disappears from the Company's records."*

Attempts have been made to trace a direct connection between a guild and a trade union, in the building industry, by linking up the Freemasons and the Operative Stone Masons, and a prima facie case of some strength can be made out. The " Antient Charges of a Freemason " (*Constitutions*, pp. 6–9 of the 1866 edition) contain provisions which make it quite clear that their original function was that of preserving the craft rights. Such rules as " All the tools used in working shall be approved by the Grand Lodge " or " Both the master and the masons receiving their wages justly shall be faithful to their lord and honestly finish their work, whether task or journey, nor put the work to task that hath been accustomed to journey," prove that Freemasonry had once a genuine industrial function. Masonic grades, moreover, have a basis in the actual operations in the mason's shop: the constitution of Freemasonry is elaborately based upon the real processes of masonry. Indeed, there is little reason to doubt that Freemasonry is the legitimate child of the forbidden covines and chapiters. It is further argued that the

* Englefield.

break of 1717 shows that the true operative masonry remained with the journeymen and that the existing union and not the Freemasonry is the real inheritor of the medieval guild.*

It cannot be denied that at the date mentioned, 1717, a complete change was made in the masonic organisation, and that its effect was to exclude the operative element and turn Freemasonry into the general secret "speculative" society which it is to-day. A Masonic historian observes:

"If we survey Free Masonry as it existed in the early "part of the seventeenth century we shall find it to "consist of three Degrees only and these chiefly Opera-"tive. In our own country we search in vain for "evidence of a Lodge of pure Speculative Masonry. "The Operative Lodges preserved and transmitted our "secrets, taught morality and theoretical science, and "received amongst their members Kings, Peers and "Prelates, who were lovers of architectural studies and "pursuits; thus blending Speculative with Operative "Masonry, until the latter portion was excluded in "1717. After this period, I regret to say that Free "Masonry does not present the pleasing picture of "Brethren working together in harmony and bro-"therly love."†

The mystification practised deliberately by Freemasons makes a positive statement difficult. When the reader is required to believe that Freemasonry was organised at the building of the Temple, or, alternatively, by Nimrod on building the Tower of Babel, or even by the builders in the lost continent of Atlantis—all these statements have been publicly made—he is

* See for all this O.S.M. Returns, 1914, pp. 270, 316, 357, 567, 738, 781, 884. † G. Oliver's *Landmarks*, ii, 24.

inclined to dismiss all Freemason records as equally gross lies. But the truth of the matter appears to be as follows:

The old guild, known as the Worshipful Society of Free Masons, Rough Masons, Wallers, Slaters, Paviors, Plaisterers and Bricklayers, was at the beginning of the eighteenth century in the state of collapse and decay common among the medieval Guilds. Sir Christopher Wren, Grand Master Mason, treated his post as a sinecure. Dr. James Anderson, Chaplain of St. Paul's Guild of Masons, had the idea of admitting persons who were not masons at all into lodges of "speculative masonry." To him and to his new Grand Lodge adhered the vast majority of existing Freemasons, but a portion seemed to have remained in Operative Lodges, and a body calling itself the Worshipful Society of Freemasons Operative existed in 1914 and probably still does. But it was not the originator of the later unions: it was purely a master-masons' organisation. Its ritual has no resemblance whatever to that of the Operative Stonemasons, and even its own advocate admits that "later the workman of the lower grades decided that they would not continue to work under the guild system." It is interesting to note that it was "binding" apprentices in York as late as 1867.*

No extant building trade union dates back into the eighteenth century, nor were there any of the local clubs, now absorbed in larger unions, that could set up even a probable claim to have existed before 1800. In that year was founded the Friendly Society of

* But the proofs of the connection of the Freemasons (Operative) with the Worshipful Society have by no means been satisfactorily set out. See O.S.M. Returns, 1914, pp. 567, 357; *Tectonic Art*, by C. E. Stretton (Melton Mowbray, 1909); *The Guild Charges* by John Yarker; the *Co-Mason* for 1914.

Carpenters and Joiners at the Running Horse (London —still existing after 123 years as a branch of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers), which appears to be the oldest building trade union of which direct evidence exists.* Nor do we find the builders' operatives among the various trades which petitioned Parliament from time to time to issue instructions for the regulation of their wages and conditions, to save them from the rapacity of their employers. This was due to two reasons. The first was that the development of the capitalist system and the growth of the large employer, was slower in the building trades than elsewhere. The contractor who estimates to a customer for the whole house and himself arranges for the various branches of the work—bricklaying, plumbing, carpentry and so on—does not become common until the next century, and the gentleman who desired either repairs to his house or fresh building in the eighteenth century would have applied separately to the master-plasterer, carpenter or bricklayer, and have paid him by the piece according to the detailed price-lists printed and current at the time. Postlethwayt in 1774† understood by a master-bricklayer one who worked at the trade himself and merely had labourers to do the heavy work. But he added, significantly enough, that some master-bricklayers were beginning to live "handsomely" and employ many hands. In this entry we have a picture of the building trades in transition.

* Another London Society probably dates from this year: "The Second Society of Carpenters," but nothing is known of this except that it was a constituent member of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners in 1860. Its membership, which had once been 1,300, had then fallen to 66.—See A. S. C. J., first annual report.

† *Universal Dictionary*, "Bricklayer."

The second reason for the absence of any records of local trade union clubs in the building industry is, of course, the Combination Acts, which made it dangerous for any record of any kind to be made in print or writing, or preserved one minute more than was essential. That these clubs existed there is no reasonable doubt—Francis Place, of whom we shall hear more later, drafted rules for local societies of carpenters and plumbers about 1795.* Mr. Englefield quotes the appeal of a Liveryman (master) to the Court of the Painters' Company in 1749 against a "club of journeymen painters that would not work nor let others work."† A short-lived combination was formed in 1764 by the Edinburgh masons, who struck for higher wages, wanting a rise from a "merk Scot" (1s. 1½d.) in summer and 10d. in winter to 1s. 3d. and 1s. They offered their labour direct to the public and appealed to the Magistrates and Council, who replied that their conduct was "illegal, tumultuous and unwarrantable," and ordered them to return to work at such wages as "the said masters shall think reasonable." ‡ We can never trace the history of these local societies, many of which were no doubt quite ephemeral, while some may have been of considerable antiquity. Probably, however, if we had been in a position to observe the appearance of these local trade unions, we should have seen club after club of painters, masons, and so forth that had for many years met for festive purposes at the Masons' Arms or whatever might be the local public-house, gradually assuming trade union functions. Actions "in defence of the craft," first against improperly employed apprentices, and then generally against worsening conditions, become more and more frequent, and the club which originally was

* *Wallas*, p. 79. † Englefield, p. 152. ‡ *S.O.M. Journal*, May, 1914.

held only for sociability and beer-drinking—at the most, for some "friendly" benefits—gradually becomes a trade union. Whether this be an accurate picture or not, we find that all these early trade unions have in fact their nucleus round a public-house, and are operating spasmodically throughout this period to preserve their ancient rights or working rules. Without doubt these societies would have spread beyond their local limits and become in time national societies, had it not been for the operation of the Combination Acts, whose passing and effects we will consider shortly.

It is not the case that before these Acts were passed trade unions or trade clubs were always permitted to carry on their activities undisturbed. The old "companies" or guilds were the only bodies theoretically recognised as having the right to exist in their various industries. The journeymen's clubs could be suppressed and their members fined for conspiracy. On Monday, 4th November, 1789, four London carpenters were brought up at the Old Bailey charged with "conspiring against their masters to raise wages." Their defender agreed that "such indictments were instituted for the purpose of preventing combinations, very dreadful in their nature and consequence," and in effect appealed to the mercy of the Court. The defendants, expressing contrition, were bound over. It is unfortunate that in the only copy of the proceedings that survives* no indication is made either of the Act under which conviction was secured, or the conduct of the carpenters which had led to it.

Anything that might appear to be a "conspiracy to raise wages" was already punishable. But a mere combination of journeymen in a particular trade was not.

* Burns, various.

On the contrary, such combinations existed and appealed on occasion to Parliament. The journeymen, as we have observed, in the trades most affected by the new conditions, which were not so much felt in the building trades, took at first what seemed to them the right and traditional method of appealing to Parliament to enforce the various old statutes which provided for the fixing of wages by justices of the peace, notably the Elizabethan Statute of Apprentices, as expanded and altered later. These had gradually fallen into abeyance, and various appeals were made for their re-enforcement, or for the passing of new laws—up to 1757 with general success.* In that year the Woollen Cloth Weavers' Act was repealed and from then onwards Parliament turned a less favourable ear to such appeals. By the end of the century they had been so continuously refused that it was recognised by the workers that any appeal to Parliament was useless. Nor were the legal proceedings initiated by the workers under the old statutes found to be of much greater use : the justices simply refused to operate them, and in one case at least Parliament intervened to suspend them upon a prosecution being commenced. Eventually, in 1813, the clauses empowering justices to fix wages were repealed altogether, and this was followed by the repeal of the clauses dealing with apprentices.

This sudden change in the attitude of Parliament from 1760 onwards cannot legitimately be blamed upon the school of economists headed by Adam Smith, whose *Wealth of Nations* was only published in 1776, although they approved of it and provided later its theoretical justification. It was due partly to fear of the increased activity of the journeymen's clubs, which were supported in many cases by the small and old-fashioned

* Webb, p. 51 onwards.

masters, partly and to a greater extent, to the opportunities which the ruling class controlling Parliament saw for self-enrichment. If the new processes were allowed to develop freely and without medieval restraints, there seemed no limits to the profits that might be obtained and the wealth that might be created. Landlords like Lord Londonderry, who saw their barren moors become coalfields of fabulous value, or the Duke of Bridgewater, who made a fortune by canal-building, were not likely to be tolerant of any hampering of their operations by Elizabethan statutes or combinations of journeymen. The newly rich employers in the towns assured them that these hindrances would not only cripple the new trades but would ruin the exports of the country and prevent England carrying through the French war to victory. They added that the combinations of journeymen were little better than concealed Jacobin clubs, and that it was from such societies that the French revolutionaries had drawn their strength.

Such motives and such excuses, true and false (for what similarity was there between the carpenters' local clubs and the Club des Jacobins in Paris ?), rather than the *laissez-faire* economics of Adam Smith, were the real cause of the final blow dealt by an oligarchic Parliament to the workers—the passing of the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800. The first Act, forbidding all combinations, was introduced by Pitt on June 17th, 1799, and was rushed through the Commons and Lords in three weeks. The violent agitation, the volume of petitions and protests which this provoked, were sufficient to compel some slight and small amendments in 1800, but the Act of that year made no substantial alteration in its predecessor, which remained the law of the land for a quarter of the century.

The law, as finally amended, sentenced (for the first offence) to three months in gaol or two months hard labour any workingman who combined with another to gain an increase in wages or decrease in hours, or solicited anyone else to leave work, or objected to working with any other workman. This sentence was not to be given by a jury, but by two magistrates, who though they should not belong themselves to the trade involved, would without doubt belong to the employing or landowning classes. Appeal was forbidden unless " Two sufficient sureties in the Penalty of Twenty Pounds " were given, which of course no worker could do, especially as anybody who contributed to the expenses of anyone convicted under the Act was to be fined £10 and the receiver would be fined another £5. The removal of a conviction by *certiorari* was forbidden. Perhaps the meanest of all the clauses was one by which the defendants were forced to give evidence against each other.

This Act also forbade combinations of employers, but not a single instance of any enforcement of this provision is on record, although masters' combinations were frequent and tyrannous in this period. Even had it been enforced, the penalties were trivial—not imprisonment but a fine of £20—while, as Cobbett pointed out, they could not be forced to give evidence against each other. And who should prosecute them ? " To prosecute at all, money must be raised ; to raise money there must be a combination among the men, and then they may be prosecuted by the masters."*

Such an Act, while it did not destroy combinations because of the inefficiency of the organisation of repression, did mean that combinations only existed by license of the employers.

* Select Committee, *Place.*

"A unanimous refusal to work at reduced prices "was regarded as sufficient evidence of unlawful com- "bination, and the non-acceptance by an unemployed "journeyman of work offered to him by any em- "ployer in his trade, meant liability to undergo a long "period of imprisonment or to be impressed into "his Majesty's sea or land forces. . . . 'Justice,' Place "wrote, 'was entirely out of the question; the working "'men could seldom obtain a hearing before a magis- "'trate—never without impatience and insult; and "'never could they calculate on even an approximation "'to a rational conclusion. . . . Could an accurate "'account be given of proceedings, of hearings before "'magistrates, trials at sessions and in the Court of "'King's Bench, the gross injustice, the foul invective "'and terrible punishments inflicted would not after a "'few years have passed away, be credited on any but "'the best of evidence.'"*

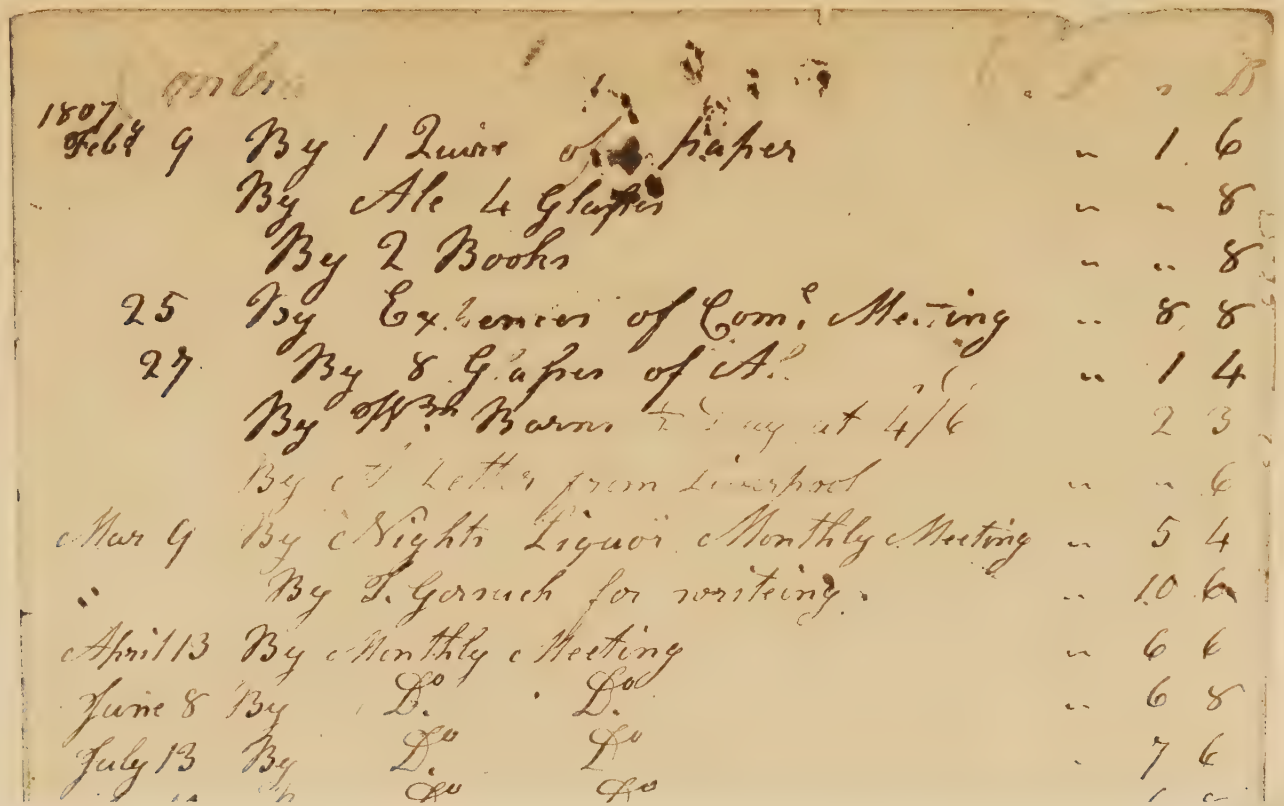
With such a law and such administrators the life of a trade union was short and uncertain. For twenty-five years any union that offended a master, or was in any way active, was dealt with under these Acts. Case after case exists of unions brought into the open by a prosecution under the Acts and forced to dissolve, while its active members were punished by sentences of imprisonment running sometimes into years. Such punishments —which included public whippings†—were awarded even in cases where the employers had connived at and welcomed the journeymen's associations; where any resistance had been made to the encroachments of the unscrupulous new employers the penalties were even more severe. The compositors on the *Times* were prosecuted in 1810 for belonging to a combination, and in

* Place, in *Wallas*, p. 198. † Select Committee, *Hall.*

sentencing them to periods of imprisonment varying from nine months to two years, Sir John Silvester—known as Bloody Black Jack—said: "Prisoners, you have been convicted of a most wicked conspiracy to injure the most vital interests of those very employers who gave you bread, with intent to impede and injure them in their business; and indeed as far as in you lay to effect their ruin. The frequency of such crimes among men of your class of life and their mischievous and dangerous tendency to ruin the fortunes of those employers which a principle of gratitude and self-interest should induce you to support, demand of the law that a severe example should be made of those persons who shall be convicted of such daring and flagitious combinations in defiance of public justice and in violation of public order. No symptom of contrition on your part has appeared—no abatement of the combination in which you are accomplices has yet resulted from the example of your convictions."*

Under such conditions, those trades whose organisation did not disappear were driven to more secret organisation. The oaths and initiations which play such a large part in the later history of building unions in part date from this period. The London tailors replied to their oppressors by a strict and rigid centralization. "Their system" said Place "is all but a military system. The orders come from the Executive and are always obeyed. There are upwards of twenty regular or *Flint* houses of call in London: each house has a delegate and they elect five other delegates who are technically called the Town."† This executive possessed the unlimited confidence of its constituents, and had full powers to call strikes. Sometimes the shifts to which

* *Times*, December 13th, 1810. † Select Committee, *Place.*



1807 Feb 9 By 1 Quire of Paper .. 1 6
By Ale 4 Glasses 8
By 2 Books 8
25 By Expences of Com.e Meeting .. 8 8
27 By 8 Glasses of Ale .. 1 4
By Whit Barns 4 Day at 4/6 2 3
By a Letter from Liverpool 6
Mar 9 By a Night Liquor a Monthly a Meeting .. 5 4
" By T. Gornall for writing .. 10 6
April 13 By a Monthly a Meeting .. 6 6
June 8 By D.o D.o .. 6 8
July 13 By D.o D.o . 7 6
By &c &c

Facsimile of part of the first page of the Minute Book of the Preston Joiners Society. This is the earliest remaining building trade union document.

they were driven were even more dramatic. Mr. George Wilde wrote : " I find that the society of ' Ironfounders ' which began in 1810 used to meet on dark nights on the peaks moors and wastes on the highlands of the Midland Counties, and the books etc. of the society were buried in the ground."* The Coventry Weavers' Aggregate Committee severely punished any breach of its rules by member and non-member alike : " the punishment was that the offender should be placed on an ass, with his face towards the tail of the animal and drawn about the town, exposed to the ridicule and violence of the mob."†

Such dramatic devices, such gross oppression, were the lot chiefly of trades which attempted either notable militancy, or tried to extend their clubs beyond the limits of a single town. This the builders did not try to do. They confined themselves to the little local clubs which were the predecessors of the modern trade union movement. These did not disappear. All over England and Scotland the skilled craftsman continued to hold the fortnightly meeting of his trade club at the public house, and the records or rules of some of these bodies have survived. In many areas these clubs had an undisturbed existence extending over many years. This was partly due to old custom, and the consequent forbearance of the employer who was not, as to-day, a great general contractor but a man who had been and might again be an operative. It was partly also due to the concealment of the trade union activities under a disguise of friendly benefits, and to the incompetence and unintelligence of the Government officials. No reasonable doubt exists

* From *Trades Unions, their History and Objects*, a Lecture by Mr. George Wilde, Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Journeymen Felt Hatters, 1886. A.S.W. Misc † *Observer*, November 24th, 1822.

that these few societies of whom records remain were trade unions. The Secretary of one of them, John Beveridge of the Seamen's Loyal Standard, admitted to the 1825 Committee of the House of Commons that his society was " nominally benefit " but in fact was constituted " because we would not join any man's service unless we were better paid " and attained its desires by personal violence against non-unionists.* The same admission was made the year before by Hugh Boyd of the Liverpool Sawyers' Society, which was registered as a benefit society when it was actually a union.†

The mutual aid and improvement contemplated by these societies was generally by no means merely a disguise. The old traditions were very strong, and the desire for mutual improvement, as men and as craftsmen, was strong and genuine. The Falkirk Society excluded anyone " defiling themselves with unclean women—committing adultery—being guilty of any lewd, obnoxious or disloyal practices whereby he may be liable to public censure from Church or state . . . such as are disorderly, fractious, contentious, ungovernable and disobedient." Nor would it admit any " drunkard, swearer, or sabbath breaker." The Manchester Order of Bricklayers later (1829) not only excluded from benefits, as was reasonable, "any member found fighting," but combined economy with Puritanism by stopping the sick pay of any member whose disease was caused by " wrestling, leaping, racing, football, acts of bravado, drunkenness or immoral conduct." (Rule repealed 1908.) Other societies, including the Newcastle Operative Masons, stressed the improvement effected in man's nature by association. Indeed their preambles seem almost to be copied from one model. "Man is a sociable

* Newcastle. † Select Committee, *Boyd.*

being," "Man was not born for himself alone," "Man is a creature formed for society "—these phrases or variations of them occur in nearly all the rules of societies extant about 1815 and 1816. " The intent of this society," wrote the Philanthropic Society of House Carpenters and Joiners in 1812* " is upon all just occasions to assist and support each other." The " Original Friendly Society of Carpenters and Joiners, held at the Running Horse " (1800—later the Running Horse Lodge of the A.S.C. and J.) was more explicit in its enumeration of probable benefits and even hinted at hostility to the employers. " The great quantity of expensive tools which are necessary for him (the carpenter) to pursue his daily avocation expose him to a continual liability of losses from fire and robbery and as such losses cannot possibly at all times be avoided it becomes necessary to take preservative measures against unjust innovations."† In some cases there would also be a rule against the introduction of politics as destructive of harmony.

The old national Society of Operative Plumbers and Glaziers, described later,‡ retained these laws until a very late period. They fined half a crown and excluded for a month any one who fell out of work " through disorderly conduct or dishonest practices," or struck a fellow member. In common with many other societies it fined members for swearing or using obscence language. The fine was 1d. but liable to alteration, as in 1850 when James Metcalfe swore such an oath that he had to be fined 3d. The Plumbers also punished their members for being intoxicated, or betting, and even fined them for " boasting of their superior abilities, in

* Newcastle. † A.S.W. Misc.

‡ Plumbers' Rules, 1846 and 1857.

public or private." They impressed upon their members the elevated sentiments that they should feel.

"How often do we see the poor but honest working "man, he whose hand produces all we boast of beyond "a savage state, pining in sickness or distress with his "family starving amidst the wealth he has been instru- "mental in creating; whilst the wretched parent is "agonised with the idea that his wife, the best solace of "his woes, and his prattling children, whose endearing "smiles are the only charms which bind him to exist- "ence, are in danger of becoming a burden to the "parish. How rich a feeling pervades a generous mind, "arising from the consciousness of having performed a "charitable act in relieving a fellow creature in distress: "but far more delightful is the contemplation of having "rescued members from the horrors of want and ad- "ministered the balm of consolation in the hour of "need."

The "Officers' Charges" of the General Union* order the President to ask any new member, "Will you cultivate friendship and brotherly love to your fellow workmen and carefully abstain from intemperate or abusive language? Answer: I will." London Plumbers' clubs used not only to bury their members at a death, but the members would act as mutes at the funeral, while two would be delegated "to stand at the door of a departed member on the day of interment."†

The festive character of these societies also must not be forgotten. The Masons' Society and the two Carpenters' Societies which existed at Newcastle, had rules to the effect that 2d. per night must be spent in beer by

* Of Carpenters and Joiners. "In use 1845." A.S.W. Misc.

† Beeston.

every member, while the first entries in the Preston Joiners' Cashbook—1807, perhaps the earliest remaining Trade Union document—read as follows :

		s.	*d.*
1807, Feb. 9	By 1 Quire of paper	1	6
	By Ale 4 Glaſses		8
	By 2 books		8
Feb. 25	By Expences of Com^e^ Meeting	8	8
Feb. 27	By 8 Glaſses of Ale	1	4

Such entries are repeated regularly throughout the book, and are not peculiar to the carpenters. As late as 1833 the Manchester Plumbers (who paid their officers in beer) accommodated a " Deputy from Stone Maysons' Society " with as much as 1s. 4d. worth of beer.* The Warrington Stone Masons at the same date regularly record these items :

	s.	*d.*
Ale for new Members and Tylers	2	0
Ale for Committee	1	4

and on the occasion of the opening of the Lodge they expended as much as 13s. 1½d. on ale.† Members of some of the older unions can recollect this custom being carried on into their own time, and generally speak of its disastrous effect upon the order and fraternal feelings of the " worthy brothers." Two members of the Preston Joiners, indeed, attacked the practice later in 1831 and moved " that every member Pay for his own Liquor and that the 3d. per month now paid for that purpose be appropriated to defraying the expenses of the strikes," a proposal that was unanimously rejected.‡ Whatever might be the ill effects, the waste of time and disorder caused by ale-drinking at these meetings, the members were not prepared to abandon it, for the Club

* Plumbers' Cashbook. † O.S.M. Warrington. ‡ Preston Cashbook.

had in most cases been formed as much for sociable purposes as for trade protection, and if the first aim was forgotten it might well disappear.*

We are not able to trace or date the origin of most of these societies in the building trades—very rarely do we find such a record as the gallant Warrington entry :—

" The names of those who tied themselves with one " shilling to become members of the Warrington Opera- " tive Stonemasons' Society, Sept. 1st, 1832."†

(Eleven shillings was all their capital.) It is only occasionally that we are able to catch a glimpse of them at work, and that only for a minute or two. It would appear that the Carpenters were the most advanced in organisation, though that may be merely the result of chance which has preserved us unrepresentative records. It is true that in 1803, when awarding the London carpenters 25s. a week, Mr. Justice Moser expressed his pleasure at the absence of any combination in the trade; but it is more than likely that the learned judge was deceived, for the workers had learned how to keep their own secrets. In 1810 the London building trades—bricklayers, plasterers and carpenters—were sufficiently well organised to strike and secure an advance of their weekly wage from 28s. to 30s.‡ The Carpenters had five London societies, all registered as benefit societies and

* "Drink Stewards," "marshalmen," were officers who under various names had the task of fetching and distributing beer for the members so as to interfere as little as possible with business. Disorder was, nevertheless, frequent and many instances occurred not only of quarrelling but of actual fighting in Lodge meetings. But in this indulgence the workers were only following the general practice of the classes above them. "No one" writes Sir George Trevelyan, "can study the public or personal history of the eighteenth century without being impressed by the truly immense space which drinking occupied in the mental horizon of the young, and the consequences of drinking in that of the old." (*The Early History of Fox*, p. 89.)

† O.S.M. Warrington. ‡ Select Committee, *Martin*.

containing about 2,500 members.* In 1816 the carpenters of London were faced with an attempt by the masters to cut their wages down from the 35s. they had won. The Marquis of Granby Society issued an appeal to the masters, saying that " single men only can live, and this accounts for the present wretched state of society—no wonder the streets are full of prostitutes when matrimony is the sure road to poverty." The appeal was not heard, the London Societies struck and issued a notice offering their direct labour to the public at eight public houses, their places of meeting. This was apparently the first occasion on which the master carpenters had recourse to the Combination Acts, and their appeal was at once followed by a counter action on the part of the men. The result was significant. The masters had met regularly and openly, and had quite openly arranged a general reduction of wages. Under the terms of the Combination Acts this was without question a conspiracy to reduce wages. On the other hand the men's societies, although they were proved to exist, were not proved to have any of the objects or have committed any of the acts forbidden by the laws. But the men's leaders were sentenced, two to a year's imprisonment and three to one month's, while as for their prosecution of the masters " they did not prove it because the magistrates quashed the information and they could not prove it."† In spite of this the struggle was carried on and the cuts demanded by the employers were partly, but only partly, withdrawn.‡

The London painters had made the best of a bad job almost at once. Immediately upon the passing of the first Combination Act of 1799, the almost defunct

* Select Committee, *Crowhurst.*

† The evidence of a master. Select Committee, *Martin.* ‡ Place C.

Painters' Company was induced by the journeymen to call a meeting of masters and journeymen to consider any outstanding causes of dispute. This meeting agreed upon the following three resolutions :

" (1) That fair equitable and liberal wages as between " Master and Journeymen should be paid, namely, at " the rate of one guinea per week for good and able " workmen—a day's work being reckoned from 6 o'clock " in the morning till 6 o'clock in the evening—and in- " ferior workmen according to their abilities.

" (2) That the Act to prevent unlawful combinations " of workmen be enforced.

" (3) That an abstract of such Act, with the above " resolutions, be printed and delivered to the Masters " Journeymen and occupiers of houses of call for the " trade."*

These wages and conditions were not " liberal," as wages went even then, though they were not outrageously bad. Good or bad, the Painters realised they were lucky to secure them at all, and the trade seems to have remained fairly quiet during the whole period of the Combination Acts.

Even in London, however, the unions could sometimes show themselves. One of the most interesting appearances of building trade unionists was in 1820, when George IV infuriated all decent opinion by refusing to have his Queen Caroline crowned with him, upon excuses of her unchastity—on which subject the less he spoke the better. The London Bricklayers came out of their obscurity to present publicly an address to the Queen expressing their "utmost disgust" and "strongest indignation" at the way she had been treated. The Queen graciously replied, offering her thanks and

* Englefield, p. 152.

flattering the bricklayers by observing " If we were to separate the industrious or productive classes from the other classes of the community, the residue would form only a variegated mass of idlers and voluptuaries."*

The Dublin operative builders more than held their own. The Chief Constable informed the Select Committee in 1824 that " Every trade has its separate club, what they call their committee." He thought it would be dangerous for non-unionists to work—the builders had beaten one " black " to death already and had then beaten the informer, a man called Cam working for Mr. Doolan. Further evidence showed that in spite of the laws the Carpenters' society which had existed " upwards of 60 years " was able to drive out non-unionists and enforce strictly its rate of 4s. 4d. a day—it even had a National Committee of five, one man for each province and two for Leinster.†

Neither the London nor the Dublin experience was probably typical of the country as a whole. The ordinary life of a builders' operatives' club is shown to us by the peaceful records of the Preston Joiners already mentioned. Money comes in regularly through "collections" which we should call subscriptions and " articles " which are presumably apprentices' fees. This money is spent as regularly in beer, and unless it is concealed under " monthly expences " there is no record of any conflict of importance with an employer. The organisation extends itself, opening lodges apparently at " Boulton and Blackburn " and even as early as this there is sufficient communication between the local carpenters' clubs for there to be a system of relieving travelling unionists. (" Sept. 8th, 1808. Paid John Holliday for tramp money, 3s. 6d.") The membership does not change

* O.B.S. Monthly, January, 1870. † Select Committee, 421, 429.

very much, it remains about 45 until 1821, with the exception of the year 1816, when many "left town" in a vain search for employment elsewhere in the great depression. For the rest a peaceful, almost a stagnant, existence.

This relatively calm history is partly due, of course, to the character of the activities undertaken by the clubs. If we were studying a modern trade union we should expect to find its members and officers mainly concerned with questions of wages and hours. The building unions have all throughout their history regarded their problems rather in a different manner. To them the paramount question has always been the "working rules" —local agreements with employers which, as their name implies, cover all sorts of conditions and regulations of employment. Wages and hours may, of course, be included in these, but not until quite recently have they been regarded as matters that should be in the hands of a central body and standardised and regulated according to a general rule. They remained for a longer time than in most unions the affair of the local unit, the Lodge, and even in that most efficient of building unions, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, rates of wages varied as late as 1897 between 5d. and 10d. an hour, there being as many as 20 different rates. Hours in the same union varied from 41½ a week at Middleton to 60 at Yarmouth.* Moreover, wages and hours were only portions of the "working rules" and not necessarily the most important portions. These clubs of skilled craftsmen (builders' labourers' organisations, if they existed, were too ephemeral to leave traces) would probably have pointed to at least two other provisions as of far greater importance—the old

* Webb, I.D., I 255.

regulations as to apprentices and the exclusion of "blacks" or "strangers," two terms practically synonymous in early days. As late as 1838 the Operative Stonemasons attempted to reimpose, in some districts, the rule of seven years' apprenticeship, from 14 to 21.* The exclusion of "blacks"—men who had not been properly apprenticed or who did not belong to the local union—has, of course, been an aim of Trade Unionists throughout their history, but in these early days, when a union rarely extended outside a particular town, it involved also the exclusion of all strangers. An itinerant mason or joiner who entered Warrington or Preston would by no means be necessarily admitted or welcomed by the local trade club, and if he were excluded, he stood very little chance of getting a job. A relic of this parochialism lasted till the end of the last century, when some Stonemasons' Lodges still habitually forbade the importation of worked stone from outside the town, whether worked by union labour or not. In 1862, even, the Manchester Stonemasons declared "black" certain stone which they were asked to work for an Altrincham job, although they were to be paid a higher rate than the unionists of Altrincham, to whom they claimed that the job should be given.† This astonishing case of altruism may be exceptional, but the general belief that "trade should be kept within the town" was undoubtedly strong, and in enforcing it the local clubs could generally count on the sympathy and often open assistance of the employers. Of other activities we have already noted the first beginnings of the "tramp" system—the giving of money or relief to members travelling in search of a job—which for many years took the place of out-of-work benefit. The existence of the local trade club was also

* O.S.M. Old Returns, July, 1837. † Webb, I. D., I 77

welcomed by both employers and operatives because it provided a convenient substitute for the modern Labour Exchange. It was the general custom for the employer at this time to inquire for extra labour at the public-house where the society met, with a fair certainty of finding satisfaction. Rules, such as that of the Manchester Order of Bricklayers, punishing members who let a " stranger " hear of a job while any society man is out of work, have their origin in this custom. We may also mention, as subjects of " working rules," such questions as the providing of tarpaulins to protect masons at work in the rain (London Stone Carvers, 1876), the providing of mess-houses or other places for meals (London Plasterers) or of lock-ups for tools (Nottingham Bricklayers), grinding money (General Union), " watering " or " bagging " time (tea half hour), no working by candlelight, and many other detail working rules which have formed the subject of innumerable agreements and disputes between the employers and the local Lodge or Society throughout the history of building trade unionism.

This relatively easy and care-free existence of local operative builders' societies under the Combination Acts was bound to come to an end sooner or later. It had only indeed been possible because the effects of the industrial revolution had not been directly felt in the building trades. Up till the very recent introduction of concrete building on a large scale, only two branches of the building trades (sawing and brickmaking) have been transformed by the use of machinery, and neither of these two branches were menaced at this date. While weavers, spinners, knitters and all hand operatives in the greatest of English trades—the textiles trade—were being reduced to starvation by the new machinery, or

driven helplessly into unhealthy factories to work long hours under abominable conditions, the bricklayer or joiner continued to work at his trade with his old tools and under much the same conditions. Indeed, the vast growth of new industrial towns in the North of England meant for the moment considerable prosperity for the building operative. Bricklayers, masons, carpenters, painters were urgently needed to build Manchester, Leeds, Halifax and the other new towns, and good money was to be had. Builders, along with the rest of the working population of Great Britain, crowded into the new cities. For builders there were, as for some other trades, at the beginning high wages and plenty of work.*

These new towns were practically a new civilisation : they were the beginning of a new and worse England. The capitalist system did not begin with the industrial revolution and the introduction of machinery : it existed and can be traced before. The effect of machinery was merely to develop it at enormous speed and to a terrifying extent. Yet between 1780 and 1820 a complete revolution had been completed in English social life. Rich men and poor had existed before. But previously the governing rich had mainly been landowners, bankers, or merchants : now there was a new class—the class of large employers. In the first twenty years or so of this period these employers were generally working men by origin, sharing the ignorance and the habits of their employees, but by the end of the period this influx of working men into the ranks of the wealthy is over, and the sons have succeeded to the proletarian fathers. In 1824 nearly all the Glasgow master masons employed between 70 and 170 journeymen masons each. One

* Hammond, T. L., 11.

of them, noted as " very drouthy," is marked as being the last to wear the leather apron. The employers had become a class.*

Beneath them, the workers had become an incoherent, almost undifferentiated, mass of suffering. The hand-loom workers, who still kept up a hopeless attempt to rival by frantic work the speed of a machine, had been reduced to a level of misery and degradation probably never before suffered by nominally free men. The factory workers, an amorphous mass of men, women and children drawn from every county and every trade, were deprived, both by law and by the absence of tradition or opportunity, of any organisation to protect themselves. They were subjected absolutely to the rapacity of their employers. Other writers have sufficiently described the appalling misery and degradation that resulted,† involving women and children in the common horror: we can only note the causes that dragged down the operative builders to a similar level.

From the very beginning they were forced to dwell in towns whose housing conditions were an invitation to degradation and vice. " Formerly," write the Hammonds, " the men who had lived in the English town, like those who lived in Pisa or Verona, were never far from the open country: their town life was fringed with orchards and gardens." From orchards and gardens they had come to live in and build towns like the Manchester observed by an economist who had no doubts of the virtues and improving character of the capitalist system:‡

"As I passed through the dwellings of the mill hands " in Irish Town, Ancoats, and Little Ireland, I was only

* Cruikshank. See also Hammond, T. L., 8.

† E.g., Hammond, T. L., Engels. ‡ Nassau W. Senior, in Engels, p. 63.

" amazed that it is possible to maintain a reasonable " state of health in such homes. These towns, for in ex- " tent and number of inhabitants they are towns, have " been erected with the utmost disregard of everything " except the immediate advantage of the speculating " builder. A carpenter and builder unite to buy a series " of building sites (i.e., they lease them for a number of " years) and cover them with so-called houses. In one " place we found a whole street following the course of a " ditch, because in this way deeper cellars could be " secured without the cost of digging, cellars not for " storing wares or rubbish, but for dwellings of human " beings. Not one house in this street escaped the " cholera. In general the streets of these suburbs are " unpaved, with a dungheap or ditch in the middle ; the " houses are built back to back without ventilation or " drainage, and whole families are limited to a corner of " a cellar or a garret."

In the rush to these new towns the feeble protective organisations, the local trade clubs, had frequently vanished, overwhelmed in the flood or decaying by the migration of their members. They were in any case incompetent to deal with so colossal a problem as modern industry. In the boom years many carefully thought-out " working rules " had disappeared, but none was more bitterly regretted than the vanishing of apprentice regulations and the substitution of " the system which existed till of late, allowing anybody to learn our trade and to serve what time they pleased " as the Masons complained in 1837.* For seven years were never, even in the old days, necessary for a man to learn (say) a mason's trade, while for the purposes of quick and shoddy building an unskilled builders' labourer who

* O.S.M., Old Returns, July, 1837

had drifted in from the other worse-off trades soon picked up enough knowledge to serve the jerry-builders' purpose. The trade was soon flooded with cheap and half-skilled labour which was contented with the rates prevailing in other trades, and the least check to the boom period—as in 1816—brought the operative builders' wages down sharply to starvation level and taught them that they were equally involved in the common ruin.

Signs of the consequent degradation are not lacking. This does not refer to the violence against scabs, which is a recurrent phenomenon in the building trades, and was regarded by economists as a proof of the wickedness of Trade Unionists. That was but a method of defence of a standard of livelihood: under certain circumstances the economists themselves would have used it. But the entries in the Masons' *Return* and Blacklists* of acts of sometimes outrageous violence to hosts or hostesses at Lodge houses, filthy behaviour of tramps, and the permission accorded to the Masons' Central Committee in 1838 to fine for acts of indecency, tell their own story. We cannot blame the operatives for this: we must blame the employers who forced them down to such a level, and the economists who urged the employers on. Nevertheless, it is clear that in craftsmanship and humanity the operative builder had declined at the beginning of this century.

Relics of their previous comfort and high standing persisted right into the reign of Queen Victoria. The Phœnix Society of Painters, an exclusive and highly-skilled London union now absorbed in the National Amalgamated Society, expected its members to attend meetings always in frock-coats and top-hats. The

* O.S.M. Misc.

present secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, Mr. A. G. Cameron, can remember old-fashioned carpenters in his youth who punctiliously turned up to work in their traditional frock-coat and top-hat, which would be carefully placed, before they commenced work, in the locker provided for them. Should such a receptacle not have been provided for them, the first thing such a skilled craftsman would do, before any other work, would be to make one. But these were only survivals. For the most part the operative builders had fallen from respected and comfortable members of society into the position of "ragged trousered philanthropists."

It is clear to us at this date that nothing short of unionism on a national scale could have helped them to recover their position. Some few members of the working class, notably John Gast the shipwright, learnt this lesson, as true for other trades as for the builders, and we have in 1818 the formation of an abortive general union of all trades, called "The Philanthropic Hercules." But these attempts did not rise from the ranks of the builders, nor in fact could anything serious be achieved until the Combination Laws were repealed.

CHAPTER II

THE REPEAL OF THE COMBINATION ACTS

FRANCIS PLACE * THE COMMITTEE OF 1824 * PLACE'S ACCOUNT * THE ACTS REPEALED * THE COMMITTEE OF 1825 * PLACE'S ACCOUNT * THE ACT OF 1825 * FIRST NATIONAL BUILDING TRADES UNIONS

1824–1830

RANCIS PLACE, tailor, of Charing Cross Road, was the one man in England most responsible for the repeal of the Combination Acts, and he was responsible for it almost single handed. He had, indeed, his representative in the House of Commons, Joseph Hume, M.P., whom he coached daily with facts, arguments, advice and figures, but without Place it is doubtful whether Hume would have attempted the task ; it is certain that he would not have succeeded. Nor did Place receive in his work any assistance, or thanks from the workers. "Working men had been too often deceived " (he writes) " to be willing to trust to any one who was not well-known to them. Habitually cunning, and suspicious of all above their own rank in life, and having no expectation of any mitigation, much less of a chance of the laws being repealed, they could not persuade themselves that my communications were of any value to them, and they would not therefore give themselves any trouble about them, much less give such information as might, they thought, be some day used against them. I understood them thoroughly, and was neither put from my purpose

nor offended with them."* Place, himself, had started work as a leather breeches maker, and had been victimised for his organising powers during a strike. He had starved for his own trade union principles and had often assisted others to form societies when he was a working man. In 1799 he became an employer, but he never forgot what he had suffered as a worker. He was much impressed and much moved by the savage oppression of the workers under the Combination Acts and in 1814 began to work seriously for their repeal. For many years, as he admitted, there was little sign of any progress. The sum of his success was a few letters and articles on the subject appearing mostly in country papers. A further advance was marked, however, in 1818 by the publication of the *Gorgon*, a weekly journal for trade societies and others, price 1½d. Place induced the editor to spend much of his space upon articles dealing with the Acts and upon existing trade combinations, which he believed would disappear once natural conditions of liberty had been restored. These articles were circulated to some master-manufacturers and M.P.s, produced a considerable effect and more particularly "induced Mr. Hume to come into my project much more than he had hitherto done." It was not, however, until 1822 that Hume felt he could announce that he would move to repeal all the laws against combinations of workmen. This, however, he did not find support enough to do, but in the session of 1823 his hand was in a manner forced by Peter Moore, Member for Coventry, who obtained leave to bring in a "complicated and absurd" Bill of his own. Fortunately, Moore consented to have his Bill held over till next year. We cannot detail the devices by which it was agreed with Huskisson on

* Place A.

behalf of the Government that Hume should move for the appointment of a Committee to deal with Exportation of Machinery, Emigration of Artisans, and the Combination Laws. The rest of the history deserves to be told in Place's own words* in his unpublished autobiography :

" On the 12th of February (1824) Mr. Hume made his " motion, and obtained his committee. It was with diffi- " culty Mr. Hume could obtain the names of twenty-one " members to compose the committee, but when it had " sat three days, and had become both popular and " amusing, members contrived to be put upon it, and at " length it consisted of forty-eight members.

"When the committee met for business, Mr. Hume " found himself in a very difficult situation ; he had been " so assiduously employed in various other matters, " that it had been impossible for him to give attention to " the details of this. He was much annoyed and em- " barrassed, no one assisted him, and some put obstacles " in his way. I offered to attend the Committee as his " assistant, but the jealousy of the members prevented " this ; they would not be dictated to—that is, they " would not have the business put in a plain way by the " only man who had made himself master of it in all its " bearings, because he was neither a member of the " honourable House, nor even a gentleman. Thus does " pride and ignorance, in all situations,from a committee " of the honourable House to a chandler's shop in an " alley show itself much in the same way, always absurd, " always pitiful, very generally mischievous. Happily " nothing can subdue Mr. Hume's perseverance, and, " like almost every man who perseveres in a right course, " he almost always finds himself firm upon his legs at the

* Place A.

" end of his labour. Mr. Hume wrote a circular letter " announcing the appointment of the committee, and " inviting persons to come and give evidence; copies of " this were sent to the mayors and other officers of cor- " porate towns, and to many of the principal manufac- " turers. Some one country paper having obtained a " copy, printed it, and it was presently reprinted in all " the newspapers, and thus due notice was given to " everybody. Meetings were held in many places ; and " both masters and men sent up deputations to give " evidence. The delegates from the working people had " reference to me, and I opened my house to them. Thus " I had all the town and country delegates under my " care. I heard the story which every one of these men " had to tell. I examined and cross-examined them ; " took down leading particulars of each case, and then " arranged the matter of briefs for Mr. Hume and, as a " rule, for the guidance of the witnesses, a copy was " given to each. This occupied days and nights, and " occasioned great labour ; much of it might have been " saved if the committee would have permitted me to " remain in the room and assist the chairman as I had " done on former occasions. As it was, I had no choice. " Each brief contained the principle questions and " answers. That for Mr. Hume was generally accom- " panied by an appendix of documents, arranged in " order with a short account of such proceedings as was " necessary to put Mr. Hume in possession of the whole " case. Thus he was enabled to go on with considerable " ease, and to anticipate or rebut objections.

" Mr. George White was clerk of the committee. He " was at first annoyed by the interference of Mr. Hume, " whose conduct had set Peter Moore entirely aside. " Mr. Moore never once attended the committee. Mr.

" White soon, however, became satisfied that I was " pushing the matter in the right way, sought my ac- " quaintance, and gave all the assistance in his power, " He told me that some members of the committee. " seeing Mr. Hume's briefs in my hand-writing, were " much offended, and had hinted at having me called " before the committee, for tampering, as they called " it, with the witnesses. It would have well pleased me " to have been so called, as I should have been able to " have shown up some honourable members in a new " light before the public.

" The workmen were not easily managed. It required " great care and pains and patience not to shock their " prejudices, so as to prevent them doing their duty " before the committee. They were filled with false " notions, all attributing their distresses to wrong " causes, which I, in this state of the business, dared not " attempt to remove. Taxes, machinery, laws against " combinations, the will of the masters, the conduct of " the magistrates, these were the fundamental causes of " all their sorrows and privations. All expected a great " and sudden rise of wages, when the combinations " laws should be repealed ; not one of them had any " idea whatever of the connection between wages and " population. I had to discuss everything with them " most carefully, to arrange and prepare everything, and " so completely did these things occupy my time, that " for more than three months I had hardly time for " rest.

" As the proceedings of the committee were printed " from day to day for the use of the members, I had a " copy sent to me by Mr. Hume, which I indexed, on " paper ruled in many columns, each column having an " appropriate head or number. I also wrote remarks on

" the margins of the printed evidence ; this was copied
" daily by Mr. Hume's secretary, and then returned to
" me. This consumed much time, but enabled Mr.
" Hume to have the whole mass constantly under his
" view. And I am very certain that less pains and care
" would not have been sufficient to have carried the
" business through.

" I had still one fear, namely, of speech-making. I was
" quite certain that if the bills came under discussion in
" the House they would be lost. Mr. Hume had the
" good sense to see this, and wholly to refrain from
" speaking on them.

" There was another difficulty, not easily to be sur-
" mounted, and this was the Report of the Committee.
" When evidence before a Select Committee has been
" taken, it is usual to discuss the matter of the report, and
" here it but too often happens that some sinister interest
" prevails. In the present case the report must have
" been drawn by me for Mr. Hume, and the consequence
" would have been such alterations, omissions, and
" additions, as would have made it useless and defeated
" the purpose intended. It was therefore agreed to devi-
" ate from the usual mode, and draw up resolutions
" which, if possible, should be substituted for a report.
" It was quite clear to both me and Mr. Hume that it
" would not only be more difficult for members to cavil
" at and alter short resolutions, each containing a fact,
" than it would be to bedevil a report drawn in the usual
" way, but as the means of detecting and exposing
" sophistry in this form would be easy and certain, few
" if any of the members would make the attempt.
" Resolutions were accordingly drawn, printed and cir-
" culated amongst the members of the committee. They
" were cavilled at, but nothing in the way of alteration

" was proposed. Time was thus gained, and at length, " when all were pretty well wearied with attending at " the Committee, it was agreed that Mr. Hume should " report the resolutions. This was gaining a point of the " utmost importance, and ensuing the progress of the " bills through the House.

" There were, however, other difficulties to be en- " countered. Mr. White and I had put the bills into form " with the fewest words possible. Mr. Hume, however, " suffered the Attorney-General to employ Mr. Anthony " Hammond, a barrister, to draw the bills; he took our " MSS., and pretty specimens of nonsense he made of " them ! He had all the necessary documents, some " suggestions in writing, and the bills themselves as " perfectly drawn as we could draw them ; but he knew " not how to use them. This caused considerable per- " plexity. We attacked his draft, and afterwards the " printed bills. He paid but little attention to us, but it " so happened that when the bills were once printed he " considered himself as having performed all that he " was likely to be remunerated for, and he gave himself " no further concern about them. We now got them into " our hands, altered them as we liked, had his copies " made and presented to the House. No inquiry was " made as to who drew the bills ; they were found to " contain all that was needful, and with some assiduity " in seeing members to induce them not to speak on the " several readings, they passed the House of Commons " almost without the notice of members within or " newspapers without.

" When the bill went to the Lords, a new difficulty " occurred. The half-crazy Lord Lauderdale intimated " that he should oppose the bills. He approved, he said, " of the principle of the bills, but it was beneath the

" dignity of the House of Lords to pass them, until " noble members had had an opportunity of perusing " the evidence taken before the Commons Committee, " which had not as yet been re-printed by their Lord- " ships' printer. If Lord Lauderdale had used these " words in the Noble House, the bills would have been " put off till the next session, when it is very probable " they would have been rejected. With almost incredible " pains taken, Lauderdale was induced to hold his " tongue, and three Acts were passed :—

" (i) An Act to repeal the laws relating to the com- " binations of workmen, and for other purposes therein " mentioned. (5 Geo. IV., c. 95.)

" (ii) An Act to consolidate and amend the laws rela- " tive to the arbitration of disputes between masters and " workmen. (5 Geo. IV., c. 96.)

" (iii) An Act to repeal the laws relative to artisans " going abroad. (5 Geo. IV., c. 97.) "

Place's victory was complete—indeed, too complete. He had caused the representatives of the governing classes of Great Britain to pass through inadvertence a law which was definitely not to their interest and restored a weapon of great importance to their natural opponents. A fresh conflict was sure to come when they realised what they had done. It was sharply brought to their notice by an immediate outbreak of strikes and a rapid growth of Trade Unionism. In spite of Place's remonstrances, the working class celebrated the unexpected gift of freedom by a general attack on the masters. Scarcely had Parliament risen than the ministers deeply regretted their previous decisions and prepared for immediate legislation to restore the Combination Acts, and onMarch 29th, 1825, Huskisson moved, on behalf of the Government, for another Select Committee to

inquire into the effect of the Act of the previous year "in respect to the conduct of workmen and others." In doing this he took Hume by surprise, for he had told him that his intention was merely to threaten the workers with re-enaction of the laws if they were not more reasonable. The Committee was appointed, packed with nominees of Huskisson, and proposed to examine "about half-a-dozen gentlemen" and recommend the re-enaction of the Combination Acts. Hume alone upon the Committee was even fair to the workers, and it was obvious that the authorities did not intend to allow Place's tricks of the year before to be repeated. In every way but one Place was at a much greater disadvantage in 1825 than in 1824. The exception was that in the meantime the workers had realised on which side their interest lay. The winter's experience had shown them that freedom of combination could be secured and was of value. From neglecting Place they turned to enthusiastic support, and he was eagerly seconded by them in his efforts to defeat the Committee. His own account of the way in which he defeated the intentions of the Government and the Committee, in all essentials, runs as follows* :—

"The Committee soon found that it was not quite so "easy to proceed in the way proposed as they had anti-"cipated. They were not a little surprised at finding the "passage to the committee-room blocked up by men "demanding to be examined, and still more so at finding "that some of them sent in offers to rebut the evidence "which had been given on the preceding day. Every "accusation was denied almost as regularly as it was "made, and evidence to the contrary was offered, not "only by notes to the chairman, but by letters to indi-"vidual members, and this was constantly repeated.

* Place A.

"In the Committee of 1824 every case was made as "public as possible. In this Committee great pains were "taken that nothing which passed in the Committee "should be known, but they were all pains to no purpose. "I knew everything that passed, and always had the "men ready to reply. Mr. Hume, with unexampled "courage and perseverance, supported the claims of the "men to be heard. Petitions to be heard were sent to the "House and referred to the Committee; they who pe-"titioned attended at the committee-room and de-"manded a hearing. The members could hardly get to "their room or from it, so completely was the passage "blocked by the men, and so well had they been in-"structed not readily to make way for the members. "This produced considerable effect on the members of "the Committee, and attracted the attention of a great "many members of the House, who in consequence "were apprised of the course the Committee had "chosen to adopt.

"Mr. Hume insisted upon it, that his bill had pro-"duced great and extensive good, and he offered the "proofs by the mouths of many witnesses who were "anxiously waiting outside the committee-room to be "examined, they having come from various parts of "the United Kingdom for the very purpose of being ex-"amined. The Committee found themselves in a "dilemma, and at length consented to examine some men. "This was a consequence of their fears. The injustice "they contemplated was so very gross they could not "encounter the exposure, with which they were "threatened as well in the public papers as in the House. "It was this, and no love of justice, which at length "operated on them. Still they did not give up their in-"tention, but endeavoured to limit the examination to

" those only who were accused by name, and to this " they adhered so pertinaciously as to exclude a large " number of those they ought to have examined. They " wholly excluded the deputies from Birmingham, " Sheffield, and several other places, who were in " London, and so fully satisfied was I of the impossi- " bility of inducing them to examine others that I pre- " vented many places sending deputies.

" The working people of Dublin and Glasgow were " accused of serious crimes. These accusations were " recorded by the Committee, and intended to be laid " before the House. Still the Committee would hear " none of the persons whom it was desirable should " have been sent from these places to rebut the accusa- " tions. Men's names were used as having in Glasgow " abetted murder ; and yet, notwithstanding the very " men who had been so named wrote to Mr. Hume and " to the chairman of the Committee requesting to be " examined, the Committee persisted in refusing to " hear them. The men said, ' We are men of good " character, have done no wrong to anyone, are at work " in the same shops and factories in which we have " worked for years, and have nothing objected to us by " our employers, we demand the opportunity to clear " ourselves from the imputation.' But no, the Commit- " tee would not hear them ; it would record the accusa- " tion, add the weight of its authority to it, and leave " the accused without a defence. Mr. Huskisson was " base enough to call the men thus accused, and thus re- " fused a hearing, ' acquitted felons,' and yet they were " unacquitted, for they had been accused only before " the Committee, who had not condescended to do " either them or themselves the justice of trying them at " the bar of the Committee.

" Notwithstanding this, no one was refused a hearing " who came with a complaint against the workmen ; no " one was refused payment for his time and travelling " expenses who gave evidence against the men, while " many of the men who had been weeks in attendance, " and were at length forced on the notice of the Com- " mittee and were examined by them, were refused any " remuneration whatsoever. It was attempted to avoid " payment by a mean shuffle. It was said the men were " not summoned by the Committee, but it was shown " that some of those who had received the highest rate " of pay, and were men of property who did not need to " be reimbursed, were not summoned ; and a direct re- " fusal to give anything to the men was the consequence. " Some, however, were paid.

" My time was wholly occupied from the day Mr. " Huskisson made his speech till some time after the " passing of the Act. I examined a vast number of per- " sons ; made digests and briefs for Mr. Hume ; wrote " petitions to the House and to the Committee ; many " letters to Mr. Wallace, the chairman ; and many to " other persons, all as the agent of the men, and for their " adoption. No one thing that could be done was omit- " ted, every possible advantage was taken of even the " most minute circumstance, and it was by these and " Mr. Hume's extraordinary exertions that the inten- " tions of Mr. Huskisson and Mr. Peel were at length so " completely defeated, and the bill called Mr. Wallace's " bill was passed.

" The Committee as it proceeded became exceedingly " indignant. Its anger when it discovered that I ob- " tained correct accounts of its proceedings was violent " and absurd. It could not bear that I should be thus in- " formed ; that their measures should be anticipated in

" letters and petitions; and that, spite of all their exer-
" tions and the advantages they possessed, they should
" every day be losing ground. They threatened to
" punish me for my temerity. I was to be sent for, to be
" questioned, to be reported to the House, to be com-
" mitted to Newgate, for daring to interfere and tam-
" pering with their witnesses.

" These were the notions these wise men entertained
" of justice. The masters might consult when and where
" they pleased; give what instructions they pleased;
" have the ears of the members of the Committee, and
" go in and out of the committee-room while the Com-
" mittee was sitting as often as they pleased. But the
" workmen were to have no one to assist them; no one
" was to instruct them, notwithstanding they were the
" party who most needed instruction. They, such as the
" Committee chose, were to go before a body of their
" superiors—great squires and members of Parliament—
" be cross-examined, bullied and intimidated, and no
" one was either to advise or assist them. So they con-
" cluded; so I resolved that it should not be. It hap-
" pened, however, that every one of the men who en-
" tered the committee-room in awe of the great men,
" came out of it with feelings of contempt for those who
" had treated them, as they invariably did, with con-
" tumely and insult, and while they did so, as invariably
" exposed their ignorance and their malice to the obser-
" vation of the men; and this, too, to such an extent as
" to take away all respect and put the men at perfect ease
" while under an examination which many had pre-
" viously looked to with considerable dread.

" Mr. Hume was at first alarmed at the threats of the
" Committee to send for me. He sent a messenger from
" the Committee to me with a note expressing his

"apprehension. I replied by the messenger; and urged
"him to provoke the Committee thus to commit them-
"selves. He did so; but they could not be prevailed
"to put their threat into execution. I was very desirous
"of being examined. I could have contrived to have had
"questions put to me which would have enabled me to
"say everything I wished to say, and the newspapers
"would have given it insertion at length; some because
"it would have answered their purposes, and others be-
"cause, as some inserted it, they could not keep it out;
"most would, however, have done it willingly on my
"furnishing them with copies. The worst the Com-
"mittee could have done would have been to report me
"to the House, and move that I should be called to the
"bar. In the meantime the examination would have ap-
"peared in the newspapers, and a very pretty piece of
"business they would have made of it. A debate in the
"House on such a motion would have been a fine ex-
"posure of the conduct of the Committee. After all, the
"House could only have sent me to Newgate for con-
"tumacy at their bar; the session was drawing to a
"close, and I should have been nearly as comfortable in
"one of the rooms of the gaoler's house as at home.

. . . . . .

"After the report had been printed and the bill came
"to be discussed, great efforts were made by the ship-
"builders and others to introduce coercive clauses,
"while Mr. Hume was effectually active to modify the
"bill. There was much vehemence and ill-temper in
"some of the debates which attended the presentation
"of petitions, and still more when the bill was in Com-
"mittee of the whole House. Mr. Denman and Mr.
"John Williams, whose great legal knowledge was re-
"spected, did good service in showing that the repeal of

" the Common Law was proper. These debates were " considered by the newspaper reporters as matters of " small consequence ; and, like many others, might be " passed by so as to save them trouble ; and they are " very inadequately reported. Once when the bill was " in Committee the debate was singularly acrimonious. " I was in the House under the gallery ; was accosted by " many members, and assured by some that there had " been no such a stormy debate during the whole ses- " sion. The House was thin, and on the Opposition side " not so many as twenty members. Sir Francis Burdett " and Mr. Hobhouse supported Mr. Hume, but he had " to bear the vehement attacks of the whole Ministerial " bench—Huskisson, Peel, Wallace, Canning, the At- " torney-General, etc., etc. No terms either as to truth " or decency of language, to the utmost extent which " ingenuity could use, so as not to be reprehended by " the Speaker, were spared. Wallace gave loose to invec- " tive, and was disgracefully abusive. Huskisson be- " came enraged, and most grossly insulted Sir Francis " Burdett and Mr. Hobhouse. Mr. Peel stuck at noth- " ing ; he lied so openly, so grossly, so repeatedly, and " so shamelessly, as even to astonish me, who always " thought, and still do think him, a pitiful, shuffling fel- " low. He was repeatedly detected by Mr. Hume, and " as frequently exposed. Still he lied again without the " least embarrassment, and was never in the smallest de- " gree abashed. This was, upon the whole, a very dis- " graceful exhibition.

" Mr. Huskisson accused Mr. Hume of having be- " trayed the Committee and suffered himself to be led " by the opinion of others. He told Mr. Hobhouse he " was obliged to talk as he did, in opposition to his " better judgment. Mr. Canning and Mr. Peel went over

" the same ground. Mr. Canning told Sir Francis Bur-
" dett he did not understand the matter, but being under
" surveillance, he was obliged to talk as he did.

" Sir Matthew W. Ridley followed in the same course.
" I was repeatedly alluded to, and stared at by all the
" House ; but as I caught Mr. Hume's eye several times,
" and saw that it in no way annoyed him, I remained.
" When they had all done speaking, Mr. Hume ad-
" dressed the House, and in about twenty minutes gave
" an account of his conduct, described the Committee,
" named me repeatedly as the man to whom he owed
" much assistance, justified us both, and made, as I
" thought, a triumphant speech. He challenged anyone
" to show that I had in any way interfered improperly,
" or had been otherwise than serviceable in all respects.
" No man on any occasion ever more completely beat
" his opponents before him. I confess I thought myself
" a tolerable sturdy fellow ; but Mr. Hume's sturdiness
" had, on this occasion, my most unqualified admira-
" tion. I am certain no man but himself could have been
" found who would have behaved with such unshaken
" firmness, and so successfully have replied to a host of
" opponents as he did. It was a very extraordinary in-
" stance of intrepidity and tact, and so it has since been
" acknowledged to have been by men on both sides of
" the House.

"When the bill was reported I was again in the House,
" and Mons. J. B. Say was with me. On that occasion
" the most rancorous hostility was again shown ; allu-
" sions to me were so particularly personal and grace-
" less, that at length M. Say proposed that we should
" leave the House, as he had observed my friends were
" made uncomfortable, and we withdrew. Nothing of
" this was reported in the newspapers. In matters of

" this kind little is ever reported; and at all times as " little as can be conveniently of Mr. Hume. He is " generally disliked by reporters, who, like other men " who follow laborious employments, are disposed to " make the labour as light as they can. They object to " Mr. Hume that his pertinacity prolongs the session, as " it very frequently also does the hours the House sits. " And on the two occasions when the House was in " Committee on the Combination Laws Bill, the re- " porters not only neglected to report Mr. Hume as they " ought to have done, but they so reported the debate as " to give the appearance of defeat to him, when, in fact, " he was remarkably triumphant.

" Ultimately the Act differed very little from Mr. " Hume's Act. It was substantially the same. The words " ' common law ' are omitted, but by the 4th and 5th " enacting clauses it is wholly excluded, both in the " commencement and close of the clauses; and this " being the principle purpose of the Act, the other altera- " tions were of comparatively small moment. There is a " long clause, differently worded in some particulars " from Mr. Hume's Act, respecting intimidation, and " the punishments for offences are increased; but the " partial, unjust, and mischievous laws which forbade " combinations of workmen to alter their wages and " hours of working are all swept away, and the new Act " 6. Geo. III. c. 129 has, by the 4th and 5th clauses, de- " clared combinations for these purposes to be legal."

The effect of the victory of 1824 and the half victory of 1825 was immediate, and to Place and others a little startling. It impressed the operatives, wrote Nassau senior, the economist,* with "the conviction of the justice of their cause, tardily and reluctantly but at last

* Webb, 104.

fully conceded by the Legislature. . . . They conceived that they had extorted from the Legislature an admission that . . . combinations to raise wages and shorten the time or diminish the severity of labour were not only innocent but meritorious." In the consequent sudden upgrowth of local trade unions with a militant policy, the building operatives played their due part, though they were not responsible for most of the more dramatic and startling attacks on the masters. We notice indeed that the Edinburgh masons held the city in a state of continual alarm by "threatening processions," in 1824 demanding a rise in wages.* Generally, however, the militancy which was so carefully exploited by the 1825 committee was due to the textile and metal workers. One single instance, and that the most dramatic, occurred in the building trades. In 1825 the journeyman carpenters of London stopped the building of Buckingham Palace and declared it "black." They closed it down for a short period and brought blacklegs out by vigorous measures. Eventually an attempt to pull out some reluctant non-unionists turned into a general battle which the Coldstream Guards were called out to end. They injured a few Society men and the work was resumed under military protection.† The builders took but a little share in promoting the various ephemeral trade union newspapers that mark this period, though one sawyer was delegated on to the Committee of the "Trades Newspaper."‡

We have no direct information as to the fate of the builders' clubs in the depression and débâcle of 1825 and 1826. It is to be presumed that they suffered disaster and defeat with the rest of the union movement. The Preston Joiners' Society, a club which survived, lost

* Place D. † Place F. ‡ Place E.

heavily in membership, falling from the 1825 high-water mark of 63 down to 35 in 1828. Nevertheless, to the general record of disaster there is one exception—the Carpenters. The workers of this trade learnt from the disasters of 1826 a lesson which some of their fellow workers have even yet to learn—the need of a national body to fight the employers. A " deputation held in London, July 19, 1827," formed the Union which had nearly a hundred years' existence under the title of the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners.* " We consider it absolutely necessary " said the Preamble, after reciting the usual remarks upon the advantages of association to man " that a firm compact of interests should exist among the Operative House Carpenters and Joiners of Great Britain and Ireland. We therefore as representatives of the several Lodges of the trade, in our name and in the name of all who may adhere to us, unite in the bonds of friendship for the amelioration of the evils besetting our trade; the advancement of the rights and privileges of labour; the cultivation of brotherly affection and mutual regard for each other's

* In the earlier period of Trade Union history the sifting of documents is made even more difficult because unions go under various titles, or occasionally none at all, being called simply "the Union." The General Union's real title, for example, was "The Friendly Society of Operative House Carpenters and Joiners." The "Manchester Unity" mentioned below, was known at various times as "The United Operative Bricklayers' Trade Protection Society," "Friendly Society of Operative Bricklayers," "Manchester Unity," "Bricklayers' Accident and Burial Society," "Manchester Order," "The United Operative Bricklayers' Trade, Accident, and Burial Society of Great Britain and Ireland (Manchester Order)," briefly referred to (said West Hartlepool in 1882) as the " U.O.B.T.A.A.B.S.O.G.B.A.I.M.O." How many trade union officials could have unravelled that collection of initials? The Society was registered as "The Three Kingdoms Bricklayers' Trade Accident and Burial Society."

welfare."* A copy of this Preamble exists, but all other records of the union prior to 1863 have been lost and we know nothing whatever of the new union's fortunes or history for many years. We are forced, in fact, to chronicle its mere foundation and leave it at that.

Two years later—in 1829—was founded the national society of bricklayers which afterwards became known as the "Manchester Unity." Of this we know even less than of the foundation of the General Union. The date itself has only been preserved by accident.† But the formation of two national unions in the building trades in two years was a clear sign of the new ideas and new enthusiasms in the trade union movement which were going to produce in a short while the great general Union of 1832.

* G. U. rules. Webb (I.D., Vol. I., 12) says nine local societies were represented. No authority is given.

† The 1844-5 audit is described as the Fifteenth General Audit. Officials of the union were uncertain of its date of origin. They suggested 1832. There is also believed to be an emblem dated 1829 in Nottingham.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT OPERATIVE BUILDERS' UNION

UNCERTAIN RECORDS * SUDDEN GROWTH OF THE NEW UNION * REVOLUTIONARY FEELING * CEREMONIAL * OATH * CONSTITUENT BODIES * CONSTITUTION * LOCAL STRUGGLES * ATTACK ON CONTRACTORS * LANCASHIRE DISPUTE

1831–1833

NEARLY all the records of a period which is in some ways the most glorious in British trade unionism, and without question the finest episode in building trade union history, have perished. There is precisely one official document left of the great Operative Builders' Union, and that is a circular of November, 1833, of no great importance. Scraps of information survive elsewhere. Oaths are quoted in hostile pamphlets, resolutions and notes can be dug out of private correspondence, relics of the previous union's rules and references to past events can be found in later union papers, vague and tantalizing references are made in the contemporary Press. From such material, from suggestions, slanders, suppositions, the history of this great Union has to be reconstructed. The task is as difficult and teasing as attempting to read a half-erased manuscript; the result is even less satisfactory, for of hardly one single event in the resulting record can we be absolutely certain. Yet this task has to be done, and it is hoped has been attempted in the following pages with a certain amount of success. Documents are perishing every day, and it is urgent that what fugitive outlines of this great past period can be recovered should be placed on record at once.

We know that the Operative Builders' Union of 1831 to 1834 was divided into partly autonomous sections, of an unknown number,* corresponding with the various crafts—masons, painters, slaters and so on—each of which retained for certain purposes its own name. We cannot answer the question whether these individual societies in all cases preceded the formation of the general Union. If we knew at what date the Union was formed, we could answer this at once. The only published reference gives the date as 1828,† but the authority is almost worthless. If we could trust this date, it would prove that national unions did not exist, except in the carpentering trade, before the coming of the great Builders' Union, and that this was the parent body of the numerous building trade unions which existed in the nineteenth century. For the Manchester Unity—the national society of Bricklayers—was not in existence before 1829, the old national society of Operative Plumbers and Glaziers cannot be traced back beyond 1831, while the Stonemasons' exact date is March 23rd, 1833. (It is preserved in a notice in the *Working Man's Friend* of that date. Local organisation, of course, preceded the formation of this national society. The initiative was taken by Huddersfield, the "Parent Lodge" of the later O.S.M., and the man most responsible for the extension on a national scale was Thomas Fothergill, afterwards admiringly referred to as "The No. 1 of our society." He fell into poverty in his old age, and tried to make a living by selling goods from a stall. He was presented with a small sum by the society in 1863.)‡

It is quite possible that these societies did start existence as sections of the general Union. But on the whole

* Turned later into seven. See later. † Remarks.

‡ O.S.M. Returns, July, 1863.

this is improbable. The date 1828 is very questionable, tradition only gives 1831, we have no other record of the Union prior to 1832, and we have various phrases which seem to indicate at least the beginning of national organisations before then. The Operative United Painters speak of the motives that "induced us to join the General Union of Artisans employed in Building."* The Operative Plumbers appear to have existed as a national society in 1831.† On the other hand we find the Warrington Stonemasons, when taken over by a national society in 1832, enter the Builders' Union, and not an independent Stonemasons' society. It is possible that the Stonemasons' national organisation arose from the big union, while the Bricklayers' and Carpenters' certainly did not. The Operative Plasterers (O.F.P.—meaning of initials obscure) were formed in September, 1832, and formally dissolved in order to join the Operative Builders' Union.‡ Of the others it is idle to conjecture. We have no evidence.

This, however, is certain. Whatever beginnings of national organisation may have been made, they were insignificant until the great Union took them over in 1832. In that year, the Operative Builders' Union, formed probably by a federation of existing unions, comes into prominence, and by its activities turns small feeble societies into one national body, powerful in its great membership and careful organisation. In every town that it entered, it brought an inrush of new members.

* Impartial Statement, p. 20.

† Plumbers' Rules, 1846, and Cashbook. This Society only covered the North of England. An attempt was made, at the suggestion of the master plumbers, to organise London Plumbers at the beginning of 1834, against the master builders, but the society disappeared in the general debacle. See Beeston.

‡ *Pioneer*, p. 22.

The Plumbers in Manchester enrolled in the first eighteen months of their existence seven new members. In the six months after they joined the general Union they enrolled 58. The Preston Joiners' membership rose from 32 to 75. The eleven Warrington masons who founded the Warrington Lodge found their number raised at the end of 1832 to 114. The Friendly Society of Carpenters and Joiners (General Union) had 938 members in 1832, 6,774 in 1834.* These and similar figures in the few cash-books and minute-books that remain, tell an unmistakable story of sudden advance. By the year 1833 the membership of the union, according to the *True Sun*, reached the total of 40,000, and members were still crowding in.† The Bricklayers and Masons "possessed considerably the greatest number of members," although the "Painters increased to between 6,000 and 7,000." At one single recruiting meeting in London "the extensive rooms of Mr. Savage, besides other rooms, were crowded almost to suffocation."‡

The figure of 40,000 may not seem very astonishing to us, even though it was ten times the previous hopes of any union official and forty times the average membership of a union before. But we must allow for the growth of the population of Great Britain: relatively to the increased population, a figure of 100,000 would be comparable to the 40,000 of 1833. There was, in addition, a further cause of alarm to the employers: the men were in a revolutionary temper, and they knew and feared it.

The year 1832 was the year of the greatest political victory of the English middle-class—the passing of the

* Webb, p. 125, quoting MS. records which are now lost.

† *Revolution*, p. 90. ‡ P.M.G., p. 379, November, 1833.

Reform Bill. To drive an old and obstinate aristocracy into such a position that it had to surrender its political power altogether into the hands of the middle-class, the Whig and Radical reformers had been forced to certain steps which they were now anxious to forget. They had consciously, as the French employers in 1830, led out their employees to the conflict. They had organised them, instructed them, even drilled them, for, if necessary, an armed attack on the Government. They had inspired them with speeches upon the rights of every Englishman to self-government. They had assured them that the passing of the Reform Bill and the return of the Whigs to power would mean the liberation of the workers as well as themselves. Now that the Bill was passed, and the workers were in no way relieved or assisted, the fraud was discovered and a violent reaction followed. The workers were disgusted with political action and " radical " parties, but at the same time they were enraged at their employers' victory and determined to smash their government as they had smashed the Duke of Wellington. It is the expression of this determination that occupies the history of the next twenty years of English history.

The Builders' Union was the first vehicle of that determination, and the vanguard of the first attack on the employers. In a number of trade unionists' minds, apart from the instructions of Robert Owen, which came as a great light to every member of the union, there was forming a conception of a programme which we should call Syndicalist, which has indeed many affinities with modern Sovietism. The opinion was definitely forming that the Builders' Union, and the other unions which would grow up round it, should take over, in fact, the whole administration of the country. In

running the various industries by the workers and for the workers, they would destroy the power and occupation of Parliament. The *Poor Man's Guardian* having protested against the exclusion of radical politics from the union,* "a Member of the Builders' Union" answered him thus through the non-Owenite paper, the *Man*:† "If the Bloody Old Times had written the leading article in the *Guardian* last week, I would not have intruded upon your valuable columns." What the politically minded *Guardian* does not understand, he explains, is the whole plan of the union, which is "that the lodges send Delegates from local to district and from district to National Assemblies. Here are Universal Suffrage, Annual election and no property Qualification instanter. Oh no, says the *Guardian* this will not do unless sanctioned by the wealthy. Away with such nonsense!" In the same number of this journal, one of the many that supported the rising union, the editor remarks: "The *True Sun*, the *Gauntlet*, the *Guardian*, the *Register*, and the scribes, Whig, Tory, or Republican, who do not advocate the principles of EQUALITY OF CONDITION will find themselves in the same dilemma with profitmongers in general. The Trades Unions have dispensed with their services and have refused to let them have a finger in the pie."

No certain direct evidence exists of the organisation of this union. But documents remain from which it is permissible to infer the main lines of its structure. We must turn first to the unitary cell, the basis of the whole union, the local lodge, and in that we must first of all consider the procedure, initiations and oaths, which not

* P.M.G., p. 389, 1853.

† *Man*, p. 191, Dec., 16, 1833. Editor, R. E. Lee.

only would astonish us by their peculiarity, but really have a much greater significance than is generally allowed to them.

The ceremony of initiating or "making" members was not invented by the Builders' Union, but was deliberately extended by it to every trade which it embraced. It is not true that such oaths and ritual were enforced upon every society by the effects of the Combination Acts. The old Society of Preston Joiners, for example, carried on throughout the period from 1807 to 1833 without any such ritual. When they first came under the influence of the Builders' Union (Feb. 9th, 1833) they bought a "Square and Copases," in July of the same year they provided a subsidiary lodge at Kendal with "Regalah" for the purposes of initiation. When the Society as a whole joined the big union on May 25th, 1833, it had to pay a considerable amount to the delegates admitting it, totalling £10 17s. 0d., and of this the main charge was for "Regaler" again.* In November of the same year a further expense is noted in the cashbook, on a further attempt to make the union ritual imposing to the weaker members :—

By new Top Coat for Tyler-	-	£1	.4. 6.
By Coct Hat for	Do. -		10. 6.
By Muſstaches for	Do. -		1. 0.

A further indication of the character of the ritual imposed by the union is given by the Warrington entry† : "To Painting and Gilding the Axe, 2/6."

Such ritual would be dismissed by the modern trade unionist as mere mummery. To us, indeed, who know it only from the debased and self-conscious form it has assumed in modern Masonic Lodges, Lodges of Buffaloes,

* Preston Cashbook.

† Warrington, O.S.M.

and so on, it is no more than that. Indeed, it is a little repulsive to watch grown men, slightly fuddled perhaps but in general possession of their senses, hurriedly gabbling, in a smoke- and beer-laden atmosphere, a form of nonsensical words which they all secretly despise and laugh at. But for the unionists of 1833 the oaths and ritual were not things to laugh at. The law offered them no protection against thieving officials. Spies might at any time bring disaster upon any and every member of the lodge. No other protection against internal treachery could be devised but an oath, made as terrible as form and ritual could make it. For this even the poorest society was prepared to spend money freely: the Warrington Masons paid £4 12s. 0d, while the Operative Plumbers (Manchester), whose whole income for the two previous years had only been £17 14s. 0d., paid £5 2s. 0d. for regalia without a murmur.*

Robert Owen, indeed, opposed the ceremonies, not on the ground of their illegality, but because they were to his mind "relics of Barbarism." His objections were useless against the profound conviction of the mass of Trades Unionists, and he allowed himself, with unusual wisdom, to be convinced that they were necessary as a temporary concession to ignorance.†

The ritual enforced by the union was of uncertain origin. It has been suggested that it was taken from the

*November, 1833. And repeated it in July of next year: "For Wigs, Axes and Regaler, £5 19s. 6d." Such ceremonial was retained in some trades for many years. When the famous Chartist leader, Feargus O'Connor, visited Aberdeen in 1843, he was welcomed by a procession of the trades "led by the United Bakers in full regalia, *dressed in suits of rich pink muslin and wearing splendid turbans.*" (R. G. Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement*, 1854, p. 270.) No building trade union ever attained to this gorgeousness.

† C.U. Morrison to Owen, September 2, 1833.

Woolcombers*—or from the Freemasons, this being a part of the theory that Freemasonry as a whole is an offshoot of building trade unionism. This last is untrue, but it is certain that the builders' lodges were not at this time clearly divided from the Freemasons. During the strikes of 1834 the Masonic body had in fact to be purged of trade union lodges. The Grand Master, the Duke of Sussex, sent a circular to all lodges of Freemasons, ordering them to make a full return of their membership to a Clerk of the Peace, in order to put down " all spurious Lodges, whether of Trades Unions or Secret Societies."†

It is not certain whether the union insisted upon a uniform ritual of admission. It is probable that it did not. Morrison urged Owen to arrange for a standardization of ceremonials, in order to minimize the effects of such superstitious rituals, but there is no evidence that his request was attended to.‡ Uniformity, indeed, seems to have been demanded in the Oath alone, which ran as follows :—

THE OATH

I do before Almighty God and this Loyal Lodge most solemnly swear that I will not work for any master that is not in the Union nor will I work with any illegal man or men but will do my best for the support of wages; and most solemnly swear to keep inviolate all the secrets of this Order, nor will I ever consent to have any money for any purpose but for the use of the Lodge and the support of the trade; nor will I write or cause to be wrote, print, mark, either in Stone,

* This is Mr. Webb's suggestion, based upon the occurrence of the name of King Edward III in the earliest ritual of the Stone Masons, which dates certainly from the period of the Builders' Union. In the later "Making Parts" of 1834, the name of King Solomon is substituted.

† P.M.G., May, 1834, p. 120.

‡ C.U. Morrison to Owen, September 2, 1833.

Marble, Brass, Paper or Sand anything connected with this Order, so help me God and keep me steadfast in this my present obligation; and I further promise to do my best to bring all legal men that I am connected with into this Order; and if ever I reveal any of the rules may what is before me plunge my soul into eternity.

" A person stands in front of the party to whom the oath is administered, holding a drawn sword with the point towards his breast."*

The ritual of the Stone Masons during this period has survived in MS.,† and from it we can gain an idea of what was the general procedure in the Union as a whole. The Lodge was opened by the singing of a verse to a hymn tune :—

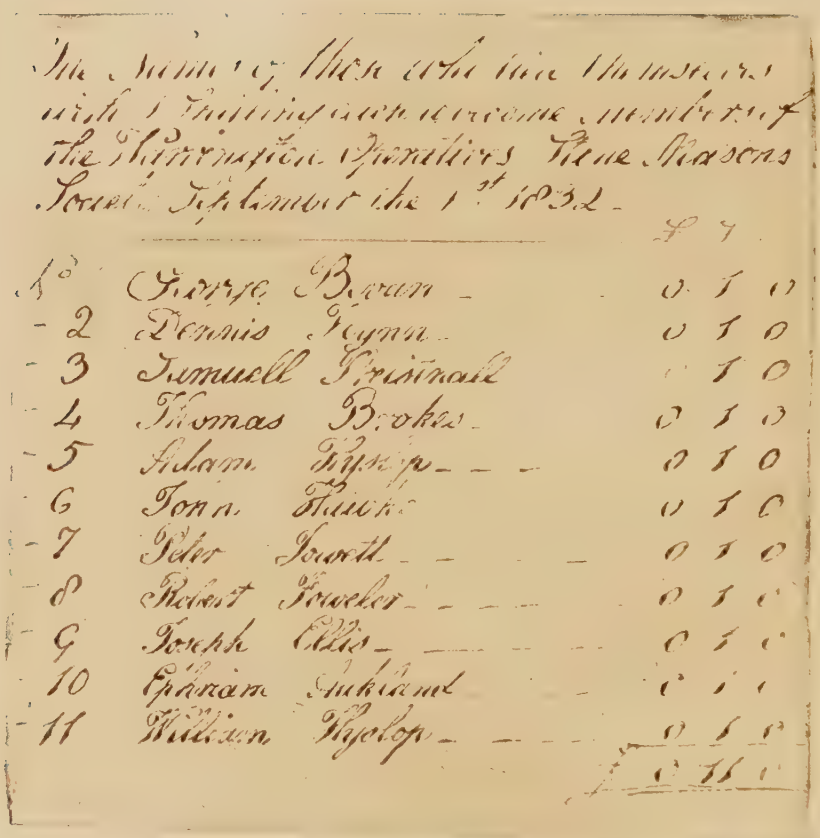
" Brethren, here we agree
" To strive for harmony
" In this our cause
" May love lead these our laws
" And help us in our cause—
" And may the Secret be
" For evermore."

This was followed by a prayer based on one of the prayers in the service of the Church of England (" O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life," etc.) and the Lodge was then declared open.

The Inside Tyler (doorkeeper) then formally asked a question of the " First Conductor," and reported to the President that the Conductor was outside with strangers desiring admittance. The strangers were admitted, and after a few words from the brother on the left hand of the Vice-President, and the singing of the

* *Remarks.* But it is not sure that this text is authentic.

† O.S.M. Misc. "Making Book of Operative S.M."



The Names of those who are the Masters with 1 Shilling a week become Members of the Warrington Operatives Time Masons Societ. September the 1st 1832.

			£	s	d
1	George	Bacon	0	1	0
2	Dennis	Flynn	0	1	0
3	Samuell	Grisinall	0	1	0
4	Thomas	Brookes	0	1	0
5	Adam	Bishop	0	1	0
6	John	Fisher	0	1	0
7	Peter	Jowett	0	1	0
8	Robert	Fowler	0	1	0
9	Joseph	Ellis	0	1	0
10	Graham	Sutkland	0	1	0
11	William	Bysop	0	1	0
			£	0	11

WARRINGTON STONEMASONS' MINUTE BOOK

First page, giving the list of foundation members. The original is in black and red.

Doxology, they were told to kneel and read the 90th Psalm. They were then formally certified as masons by the Warden, and the President addressed them in a long doggerel poem. The candidates were now, it would appear, in darkness, for after the singing of " Eternal are thy mercies, Lord," the President continued :—

" Give these strangers light."

Then he pointed to a skeleton and said :—

" Strangers, mark well this shadow which now you
" see,
" 'Tis a faithful emblem of man's destiny.
" Behold this head, once fill'd with pregnant wit ;
" These hollow holes once sparkling eyes did fit ;
" This empty mouth no tongue or lips contains ;
" Of a once well-furnished head see all that now
" remains ;
" Behold this breast where a generous heart once
" moved
" Filled with affection loving, and behold—
" Mark well these bones : the flesh hath left its place,
" These arms could once a tender wife embrace,
" These legs in gay activity could roam.
" But, alas, the spirit fled, and all is gone.
" O Death, O Death, thy terror strikes us with dismay,
" 'Tis only the just spirit, that hath left its earthly clay,
" Can set thee at defiance, and in triumph say :
" O Death where is they sting, O grave where is they
" victory ?
" The sting of death is sin, and we are sinners all :
" The heavy stroke of death must one day on us fall."

The Vice-President asked then some questions about their resolution to keep all the secrets of the Union ; these being answered satisfactorily, the candidates were put in the darkness again and swore, with one hand

upon their naked breasts and the other on the Bible, to remain loyal to the Society, and swore also, on their life, to keep all the affairs and ritual secret. Each step in the ceremony was punctuated by singing of the Doxology or " Eternal are Thy mercies." After this, the candidates, now properly initiated, withdrew, and the Lodge closed with the singing of another specially written verse.

The applicant who went through this elaborate ceremony, even if he smiled at the " Coct Hat and Mustaches," was not likely to forget quickly the promises he had made, and the oath of loyalty he had sworn. To many unionists this oath was a very real thing and one not easily broken. We have to chronicle, from time to time, thefts and peculations by branch officers, but when we consider the absence of restraint, the greatness of the temptation, and the practical certainty of immunity, we can only wonder that these cases are not more frequent, and admire the honour of poor men through whose hands passed safely large amounts of union money, with no other guarantee but their personal honesty. To the oath, too, may justly be ascribed the absence of the voluntary spies and informers, who twenty years before would not have failed to pour in.

The internal constitution of the union can be deduced from an undated—really 1832—manuscript of the rules of the Stonemasons' section, preserved in the offices of the Amalgamated Union.* This is divided into two main sections, of which the second—"Grand Rules "—

* O.S.M. Misc. Proof of date :—The Grand Lodge is mentioned as being at Huddersfield. The C.U. correspondence shows that in 1833 the seat of government was in Birmingham, the sole remaining circular of the O.B.U. shows that it was shifted to Manchester at the end of that year. During 1834 the Masons broke away. The only possible date, therefore, is 1832.

contains the general rules of the union, while the first appears to consist of rules applying only to the Masons. We may reasonably suppose that each section of the union similarly had its own byelaws. These sections at the end of 1833 were seven in number, and did not cover Scotland or Ireland. They were as follows—the order is arbitrary :

(1) The Operative Stonemasons—" O.S.M." This is, of course, the same body as maintained a separate existence till 1921 under the same title.

(2) The Operative United Painters—" O.U.P." Nothing is known of this body, because it disappeared entirely.

(3) The Operative Federal Plasterers—" O.F.P." Even the title of this body is uncertain : "federal" is a conjectural restoration, by analogy, from the title of the Scottish Operative Plasterers' Federal Union.

(4) The Operative Plumbers and Glaziers—" O.P.G." This is the body we have already referred to several times.

(5) The General Body of Carpenters. This is the General Union founded in 1827, and surviving till 1921.

(6) The Operative Society of Bricklayers—" O.S.B." This is the body which was founded in 1829, and is best known as the Manchester Order or Unity. It survived till 1921.

(7) The Slaters' Society. Nothing is known of this.*

The rules referring to the Masons alone are of little interest. They provide chiefly for the proper government of Lodge meetings, the avoidance of noise,

* Webb, p. 125, substitutes "builders' labourers" for Slaters. This is an error ; the Slaters were the seventh part of the Union, as is shown by the circular already mentioned. Labourers may have been organised with the masons, etc., by craft (masons' labourers, painters' labourers, etc.), or possibly not at all until the G.N.C.T.U. appeared.

disorder, brawling and slackness of officers, on the usual lines discussed in a previous chapter. The important section is the Grand Rules.

The title of the union is given oddly by the Grand Rules as the "Friendly Society of Operative Stonemasons and Builders in general." This has been held to suggest that the union was the creation of the masons, but is hardly sufficient evidence. The other sections of the union no doubt varied the title in their rules similarly.

The object of the union is in contrast to what a hostile critic alleges to have been its first object :—

"It was we believe in 1828 that the General Trades "Union first found an existence, and to give a correct "idea of the professed object of its founders we quote "the following from their 19th law which was then laid "down as the basis of its operation: '*That the funds of this* "'*Society shall be employed solely to prevent unnecessary* "'*reductions of wages, but in no case to procure an advance.*'"*

On the contrary, the phrasing of the rule is markedly aggressive : "the object of this society shall be to advance and equalize the price of Labour in every Branch of the trade we admit into this society."

The central and final authority of the union was the Grand Lodge, or, as it was sometimes called, the Builders' Parliament. It assembled once every six months, in March and September, in the principal towns in rotation. Every lodge sent one delegate to it, and one only. The Grand Lodge elected the Grand Officers—the Secretary, President and Vice-President—altered all rules, decided any questions of policy, approved the finances, varied, if necessary, the victimisation pay (running from 7s. to 10s. a week), and so forth.

* *Remarks.*

The Grand Lodge left behind it at the seat of Government, which varied from year to year—in 1832 it was Huddersfield, in 1833 Birmingham, in 1834 Manchester—the directing authority of the union, the Grand Committee. The rules do not state how this was elected, but in fact it consisted of the secretary of each of the seven sections, with two members of his committee, plus the three Grand Officers elected by the Grand Lodge.* The Grand Secretary in 1833 was John Embleton, the President "Bro. Lowry."† Nothing is known of either of these, but as it was usual for a secretary to hold his office at least two or three years, it is probable that much of the hard work and hard thought which must have gone to the building up of the great union was done by the forgotten John Embleton.

The Grand Lodge Committee controlled the day to day policy of the society. Its sanction was necessary for any strike for an advance of wages, and if it approved would collect the necessary levies from the lodges, who retained control over their own finances. Strikes against decreases, or against worsening of conditions, were presumed to be approved in advance. For these the lodges were expected to find their own finances (there are not recorded any arrangements for a regular sending of a percentage to headquarters), and consequently had sometimes recourse to hasty loans. The secretary's salary was paid by a special payment of 1s. per lodge per quarter.

Each of the seven sections was in control of its own expansion. Rule 21 provides "that no Lodge be opened . . . by any other Lodge that is not the same trade of that

* See the signatures to the O.B.U. Circular in Appendix.

† This was not Robert Lowry, afterwards a leading Chartist, who is said to have been a tailor.

that opens them. That Masons open Masons, joiners open joiners, and So on." The lodges were all craft lodges : we find no mention of mixed lodges. On the contrary, each craft was "governed by their own pafsword and sign, masons to themselves, joiners to themselves and so on. And no other member to visit another Lodge that is not the same trade unlefs he is particularly requested. And then he shall ask the President of such Lodge as he wishes to visit. And to be upstanding during his discourse. And that he shall withdraw as soon as he has done."

The seven trades of the union were further divided into districts, each of which had a District Lodge, situated in some convenient large town. It appears from the rules, which provide for a general District Grand Master for each district, that the seven trades were united horizontally by district also, but it is not clear whether there was a mixed District Lodge or merely an occasional attendance of trade delegates in mixed committee to support the Grand Master. The first accounts and membership lists of the Stonemasons give us the list of these districts in 1833 :*

London, Leicester, Nottingham, Cheltenham, Birmingham, Potteries, Chester, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Kendal, Newcastle.

The Masons' Lodges numbered 100 in these areas. Their membership had fallen to 3,650 at the time the record was made up (March, 1834), but they were not then the strongest section. In the autumn of 1833 their membership was about 6,000—perhaps 60 per cent. of all English masons. They made an allowance to their own national secretary, but not to the district officers. All the

* O.S.M. Old Returns. Notice there are no Scottish, Welsh, or Irish districts.

business of the district passed through the hands of the district lodge, which communicated with the centre and transmitted money.

This organisation impressed itself deeply on the building trades. The seven sections were complete republics in themselves, and when the union was shattered the sections that split off and survived retained the organisation with which Embleton and his fellows had provided them. The Stonemasons, for example, retained their organisation intact for ten years, and indeed made no serious and fundamental change till the days of Henry Broadhurst, nearly half a century later. Initiations, Lodge procedure and rules, national and local organisations, the forms of all these were cast and decided by the great Builders' Union, and for many years remained unchanged. One of the most surprising of its customs—the changing of the seat of government at regular periods—was retained with other rules by the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners right up till its absorption in 1921, and for many years also by the Bricklayers (Manchester Order).

The union was very quickly involved in local strikes. The same disease that was to ruin its later and greater rival, troubled it. Local unattached societies entangled themselves in disputes provoked by the general aggressive feeling of the building workers, and did not join the union until they were well involved and their funds partially exhausted. The Preston Joiners, for example, initiated a forward movement at the beginning of 1833, spending "half a day writing notes" to the various masters. One of these (Dixons) refused their demands, and the Society started a strike which did not end till the summer of 1834, in defeat. They spent fairly heavily on the strike during the spring, sending delegates about

the country to warn joiners to keep away, paying the "turnouts" (strikers) and paying blacklegs, or likely blacklegs, to leave the job and town. ("To Poor Brother for leaving Town, 6s.") They did not join the union till May, remitted a five-pound-note at the end of June, and at once proceeded to draw money at the rate of five and eight pounds a week from Manchester, their district Lodge, nor did they put their hands in their own pockets again until in October the strike in Preston became general, and they raised money for the Plasterers, Painters and Bricklayers.* On the other hand, the Grand Lodge Committee was able, in some cases at least, to exercise a restraining influence which the later Consolidated's Executive did not. The Warrington Masons, for example, ventured upon no strikes, but paid regularly through Manchester for the support of the strikes elsewhere. The Manchester Plumbers had only eight strikers on their books throughout the worst period (costing £11 only), and remitted in the three autumn months of 1833 fifty pounds to the Central Committee.†

In many cases, moreover, the masters were not disposed to resist the forward movement of 1833. The strength of the union was infinitely greater than the strength of any one of the masters, who only learnt the lesson of unity from the workers. Trade was good, and provided that their demands were presented not in a violent form and were not grossly excessive, the operatives generally met with immediate agreement. Moreover, the object of their first attack was well chosen. The union made a general attack all along the line upon the new system of "general contracting." The master

* Preston Cashbook.

† Warrington O.S.M., Plumbers' Cashbook I.

builder—sometimes calling himself an architect or a master-carpenter—who tendered a general estimate for the erection of a large building, had not only a bad reputation for tyranny and bad conditions, but was well hated by the small jobbing master. The Manchester Masons, in announcing their intentions, appealed very cleverly to the prejudices of one of the smaller firms of master-masons :

" The system of conducting the art of building in most " large towns is of a method peculiar to itself and dif- " ferent from any other to be found. Buildings in gen- " eral you well know are contracted for by master- " joiners who, while they have a just right to the privi- " leges of their own trade, have no right to those of " ours."*

For the presentation of this demand, the Masons were generally chosen, and at various times throughout 1832 and the beginning of 1833 it was generally granted, in name at any rate, throughout Lancashire.† The demands were presented in Manchester by placards announcing " that no new building should be erected by contract with one person." This was granted without difficulty.‡ The small masters were in the majority, and had still the whip-hand over the few large firms. Some, moreover, were in the union. In Liverpool there was no general builder at all upon the masters' side : the statement issued by them upon the later strike is signed only by master-plasterers, master-plumbers, master-carpenters, and so on.†

The ease of this ephemeral victory had a dangerous effect upon both sides. The small masters, who had

* November 17th, 1832. From *Brief History*. See also *Pioneer*, p. 59, for Liverpool. Many small masters belonged to the union.

† *Impartial Statement.*

‡ *Brief History.*

gladly struck a blow at their larger colleagues, were now thoroughly frightened of the power of the union and believed " that the journeymen had ulterior objects in view." The operatives themselves were misled by their easy victory. They ascribed it solely to their own strength and allowed nothing for the traitors in the enemy's camp. Hence they became reckless in their behaviour, spoiling for another fight and another victory, and quite unreasonably insulting and arrogant in their communications with their employers. Believing themselves irresistible, they had no care either to husband their resources, choose their time of attack or deflect an onslaught for which they were not prepared. " Do not for a moment," wrote the Manchester masons in May, 1833, to their employers, " suppose that *Union* is a bubble so easy to burst, or that it tis nothing more than sounding brass or a tinkling symble.... We must tell you that our Laws like those of the Medes and Persians are unalterable."*

For all their brave words, however, the Lancashire Lodges, forming the strongest area in the union, were uneasily aware that trouble was coming. They suspected some plot on the part of the masters, who were in fact privately getting together to destroy the union. There is a note of genuine alarm in the incoherent protest sent to a prominent Manchester builder :

" Mr. Goodess

" I have to inform you that we have been informed of
" your nefarious proceedings, (N.B.) your proposition
" that if the masters of all the Building Trades will turn
" out their men for one fortnight they will overthrow
" the Union at once ; now I have to inform you that if
" this be your return for us striking the shackles off your

* *Brief History.*

" legs from the contractors you cannot speak ever so
" privatly but we hear of it as soon as it comes from your
" mouth and if you can contradict this statement you
" will oblidge the Operative Plasters and Painters."

"O.F.P. and O.U.P."*

It was just about this time, during this brief lull, that the man who had, above any other man, the esteem and admiration of the British workers, began to turn his attention to the trade unionists, and particularly to the building workers. Throughout the summer of 1833 Robert Owen was travelling up and down the country—Leeds, Huddersfield, Birmingham, and elsewhere—explaining to working class audiences the principles of his new Labour Exchanges. He took particular care to address trade union audiences, to explain to them his new system, and to indicate to them the true use of their organisation and how they could make it the instrument of a real economic freedom.

He had spent some time thus when, in July, 1833, a follower of his wrote to him urging him to come to Manchester. The storm had burst and the conflict had come.† No better opportunity could be devised for Owen to come out, to direct the union in the right course in its difficulties, and no better place could be devised for that than Manchester, the heart of the conflict and the strongest centre of the union. " The Trades Union," wrote his informant, "I am told receive more than 1000£ per week, they expended more than 100£ last week in misionaries alone. The Joiners,

* *Brief History.*

† In Liverpool tradition states that it was started by the masons, working on the Customs House (finished 1839), who "struck against piecework wages and marched out of the town to seek other jobs, headed by a brass band. My grandfather walked on this occasion from Liverpool to Leeds with his kit of tools on his back."—(Note to the author by J. Hamilton.)

Masons, Bricklayers, and indeed all connected with building are now out of work and the Unions throughout are looking to Manchester, these parties are anxious to hear further on Labour exchanges and have now leisure and inclination to acquire further information. You may rely upon it that this is the best posſible time for you to come out in Manchester."*

* C.U. Marshall to Owen, July 6, 1833.

CHAPTER IV

OWEN AND THE BUILDERS

ROBERT OWEN * HIS VIEWS * VENERATION GIVEN TO HIM * HANSOM AND WELSH * THE DOCUMENT IN LANCASHIRE * BIRMINGHAM * OWEN'S PROPOSALS TO THE OPERATIVE BUILDERS * THE MANCHESTER " PARLIAMENT " * GREAT HOPES

1833

HOU needest be very right, for thou art very positive, said his father-in-law to Robert Owen one day. " Very positive " Owen was in all things ; " very right " he also was in a number of things. He has been described by a much lesser man, Sir Leslie Stephen, as " one of the bores who are the salt of the earth." All that this cheap epigram means is that he was " very positive " ; in and out of season he put forward the truths which he alone had properly assimilated.

We shall have, in this chapter, to stress most of all his failures and drawbacks : we must first, therefore, explain wherein lies his abiding service to the workers, and what were those great truths which assured him the unquestioned devotion of his followers. These truths are at the heart of all later Socialist propaganda and agitation.

Owen was a self-made merchant, a cotton-spinner. Appalled at the misery and degradation of the workers under his control, he had turned his New Lanark Mills into a model factory. He had made of them an oasis of civilisation in the wilderness of savagery which industrial England was at that date. From 1815 to 1820 New Lanark was visited by dukes, bishops, and

reformers; all who were, or felt it best to pretend to be, interested in the fate of "the poor" inspected his mills. So far, he was no more than an astonishingly good employer: a Cadbury a hundred years before capitalism found Cadburys useful. From 1817 onwards, he went further. He was forced to the conclusion that their own interests would never induce the employers, one after another, to ameliorate the lot of the worker, and that his own isolated efforts would remain exceptional. He realised that the system of competition as a whole was at fault. The struggle of employer against employer produced necessarily the degradation which surrounded him. Nothing short of a complete abandonment of competition in favour of co-operation would rescue the world. He did not, except in the brief period in which he appears in trades unionism, allow that this change could be effected by direct pressure upon the masters. He still believed, in the first place, that the masters could be convinced; and in the second he was utterly opposed to politics and to anything that suggested Revolution in the ordinary sense. He believed much more firmly in attempts by the working class to do without the employer. First, he tried settlements in America on Communist lines. When these failed he turned to the proposals of the Labour Exchange, bazaars at which produce sold at its proper price of "so much labour time" instead of the currency which was at the basis of the competitive system. Here he first came into contact with the working class, and was led into the half-syndicalist revolutionary activities which we are going to consider. After he tired of this he turned to the foundation of co-operative communities and co-operative societies—these last being societies for production and not the retail shops that we know by that name.

At a time when orthodox economists were extolling the riches produced by the new system, and the wealth it showered on all except the abominably wicked and shiftless (who, they thought, alone composed the poor), the teaching of Owen that it was ruining England was a startling doctrine. It came with a suddenness only less striking than its truth, and his corollary that relief could only come through the workers controlling industry co-operatively was seized on with pathetic eagerness by the half-starved victims of capitalism. He was free both with his promises of speedy victory, and his indications of the methods, and for some years he held an unquestioned position of authority in the minds of the intelligent English worker.

" Very positive " Owen was upon a number of other more questionable propositions. His investigations into the factory system had led him to despise the easy morality of the clergy and propertied people around him, who preached that the sufferings of the workers were due to their own wickedness, and that they were being punished for their wilful violence, drunkenness and fornication. Owen saw that the degraded lives of the workers were forced upon them by their environment. To cast the blame for the dreadful scenes in the poorer quarters of all industrial towns upon the workers was hypocrisy. They had had no real choice in the matter. To the dogmas of the clergy, Owen therefore opposed another dogma, denying all responsibility for sin—" Man's character is formed for, and not by, him." Unquestionably there is much truth in this, but we should hesitate even to-day to deny all power of human volition in the formation of character. Owen not merely took it as a dogma, but enforced its acceptance upon all his followers.

For upon it he based what he regarded as the centre of his system, which was no more than the eternal exhortation to love and charity. It was not, he pointed out, of any use using rage and moral indignation against men who had never had any chance to be other than they were. Employers and men, both were the creatures of the system. Blind rage and struggling must give place to understanding. Outbursts against " tyrants " were useless ; the enemies were ignorance and competition and against them no weapons were of use, but intelligence and forbearance towards individuals. Such teaching was genuinely inspiring to his followers ; they felt, and often really were, better men for it, and the personal benevolence and kindliness of Owen drove home his lessons better than any sermons.

Indeed, both from the affection of his followers and the character of his teaching, Owen has many claims to be classed as a religious leader. He had himself no hesitation in claiming that his teaching gave a new life and a new spirit to his followers, and he took for granted as religious an attention given to his works as had previously been accorded only to the Bible. " The Professor," he wrote in a characteristic passage, " had made my *New View of Society* very popular at Geneva, and they were always the favourite topic of conversation with Madame Necker and the Professor's daughter, who were never tired of pursuing it through all its ramifications to its beautiful results, ending in the practice of the Millennium over the Earth, and the cordial union of the race as one superior and highly enlightened family."*

The shrewdness that had enabled Owen the cotton spinner to defeat the Atkinson-Campbell combine to

* Owen, 237.

get his mills was forgotten by Owen the religious leader. He proclaimed the speedy coming of his new system of society with the reckless certainty of a prophet, and even went so far as to discuss its name. " This true religion," he said, " of love and charity, evident in voice, manner and act daily to all of humankind, and in showing mercy to all sentient life, will create an entirely *new system* in forming the character of the human race, in constructing society through all its ramifications and in governing all human affairs. This great change, as it will be given to the world through me as the human agent would be, according to past unfortunate custom, called the ' Owenian ' system of society. Now ' Owenian ' has no more meaning than any of the names of authority through past ages, and which have created such deadly feud, hatred and suffering between different divisions of the human race ; and in future every means should be adopted to prevent this most lamentable practice . . . This new state of existence may be called ' The Millennium ' ; or ' The Rational State of Human Existence ' ; or ' The Natural State of Man, arising from his Physical and Mental Powers being rationally developed ' ; or ' The Union of Humanity for the Happiness of All' ; or ' The Brotherhood of the Human Race ' ; or by any other yet more expressive designation."* He suffered from the illusions which are frequently the mark of a religious enthusiast. He could seriously write that in 1817 he was " by far the most popular individual in the civilised world." He counted among his converts people who obviously were by no means converted, such as Napoleon. He puzzled his followers, and us, by announcing that the Millennium had commenced on May 1st, 1833. He finally passed more

* Owen, 289.

and more under the influence of spiritualism, declaring that the world's destinies were being ruled by ghosts with whom he held communication, as with the Duke of Kent, "whose whole spirit proceeding with me has been most beautiful; making his own appointments; meeting me on the day, hour and minute he named; and never in one instance has this spirit not been punctual to the minute he had named."*

These traits made him unreliable as a leader in any practical matter, but they did not affect his power as a teacher. He had not previously been in touch with the working class, until his Labour Exchange scheme in 1832 had brought him into close contact with them. The growth of the Builders' Union convinced him that here was an instrument to effect his revolution and bring the new system of society. For some while his deficiencies in practical ability remained unnoticed, while his eminent gifts as a propagandist and teacher secured him an immediate hearing.

The respect which he received from the builders' leaders amounted to hero-worship. No man, even if he had had a better balanced mind, less susceptible to flattery than Owen's, could have safely been the object of such adulation. The more intelligent among the building operatives had for a long time realised that unless they could understand the conditions around them they would never see better times. They could remember, or they had heard of, earlier and better times before the "great wen," London, and the lesser but filthier cities of the north grew and engulfed the workers. They knew that they had been wealthier, happier, easier in the past, but with the rest of the British workers they seemed now to have been caught in a trap from which

* Owen, 316

there was no escape. They were caged like squirrels; nothing that they could do helped them; everything they tried had been as useless as beating the air. The London carpenters in November, 1833, earnestly addressed their "General Body" upon the importance, not of a militant policy, but of making a genuine and concerted effort to understand their plight. "Study to ascertain, we beseech you," they wrote, "the cause of our impoverishment, and prosecute your inquiries till you have discovered the remedy for the evils that afflict us."* For men struggling in such darkness, Owen's teaching came as a great light. Problems that had puzzled them were solved: inexplicable facts fell into their place in a general scheme: the way out was clear.

Owen received his reward in a religious respect and deference. James Morrison, one of the most level-headed leaders of this time, and later the editor of the semi-official journal of the Builders' Union, the *Pioneer*, wrote to him:

"I hope you will not hesitate to tell me of my errors, "my prejudices and my natural discrepancies. Your "doctrines have made me a *better* and a *happier* being. "Before I knew the great truths which you have de- "veloped I was a rough and irritable stickler for vulgar "Liberty—since my personal intercourse with *you* I "have become better—but I do not feel satisfied. I have "not that *charity* which beareth all things—which en- "dureth long and is patient of suffering. Need I tell you "I have been trained to be *hasty*, *impaſsioned* and prone "to sudden bursts of feeling. You must have per- "ceived my prejudices, my ambition, my weakneſses. "Be, then, my Physician—I put my case in your hands. "Give me your counsel—your practice inspires my "perfect confidence. . . . . .

* Man, p. 146.

"I shall look upon you as a Father and try to become a "faithful Son. May circumstances be auspicious to my "Baptism and make me worthy to be

"yours truly

"JAMES MORRISON."*

In Birmingham, the propagation of Owen's views, and, indeed, the main direction of the builders' policy fell into the hands of two architects and master builders, Hansom and Welsh. "My partner and myself with his (Owen's) assistance," wrote Welsh to Manchester, "are endeavouring so to organise the great working mass of Builders in the Kingdom as to place them in a permanent position of comfort and happiness—and to destroy that ruinous system of competition amongst their guides which has reduced them to misery and involved us in almost incessant anxiety and care."†

To Owen himself he wrote :—

"It is my impression that with your assistance and "counsel we can plant a giant Tree the top whereof "shall reach to Heaven and afford shelter to all suc-"ceeding generations."‡

His partner, Hansom, who afterwards had an immense influence on the Builders' Union, was even more deeply impressed, and set himself as earnestly to work to bring

* C.U. Morrison to Owen. July 23rd, 1833. Cf. *Revolution*, p. 85, note 4, or the following passage from the will of Henry Hetherington, the Chartist (Beer II. 7) "Grateful to Mr. Owen for the happiness I have experienced in contemplating the superiority of his system, I could not die happy without recommending my fellow countrymen to study its principles and earnestly strive to establish them in practice. I freely forgive all who have injured me in my struggle ; and die in the hope and consolation that a time is approaching when the spirit of antagonism will give place to fraternal affection and universal co-operation to promote the happiness of mankind."

† C.U. Edward Welsh to Chantril, September 12th, 1833.

‡ C.U. Welsh to Owen, August 28th, 1833.

the builders' victory. His resources, his time and himself he spent freely in their service. He relied implicitly —too much indeed—upon Owen's instructions and advice, and it was in the final issue largely due to his patient and unceasing efforts that Owenism was brought so vigorously to the builders' notice, and made so deep an impression on their minds.

"We have been reading your Manifesto this morning "together," he wrote to Owen, "and were particularly "struck with the force of its truth. There does indeed "seem to be a *new life* producing to us, and a *new light* "wherewith to see things. That which under the old "system had the operation of evil, impels us to the good "and correct course. . . . The Builders are a beautiful "class of men to operate, with their minds less sophisti- "cated than others, and yet tutored to a great extent in "practical knowledge. One oldish man this morning "seemed to shrink at first from our views as savouring "of truck, as he expressed it, and of military discipline "of which he had tasted sufficient. But we changed the "words and with the words the meaning changed—he "was convinced."*

The Builders' Union was based upon three main areas, which have been ever since the three main centres of English building trade unionism—Manchester, Birmingham, and London. We find henceforward always that these three towns are the radiating centres of building unionism. If there are two societies quarrelling over the allegiance of any one craft, the odds are that one is in London, one in Manchester, and Birmingham is their battleground. In Birmingham Applegarth first struck at the General Union of Carpenters. The two Painters' societies clashed in Birmingham—one from Manchester,

* C.U. Hansom to Owen, August 13th, 1833.

one from London. The innumerable struggles between the Manchester and London Bricklayers cover a general Midland area whose centre is Birmingham. London societies have always found their Manchester Lodges most prone to kick their heels and the General Secretary; Manchester Societies have generally lost their London Lodges altogether.

In 1833 these three areas were united, as they never were afterwards, and the seat of government was at the middle point—Birmingham. From here Hansom and Welsh set out to " work " the Builders' Union. They were anxious to get the union to the point of fighting for Owenite ideals before the end of the summer, because, " the season for making bricks and importing timber was passing by."* They arranged meetings for Owen all over the country, and only one district Committee of the union—Liverpool—excused themselves from hearing him, and that for fear lest public opinion should regard it as meaning a change in the objects of the union.† The Birmingham Committee, of eight members, was sufficiently impressed by Hansom and Welsh to take their advice on most matters, and they had even induced the acceptance of one or two small contracts by the union on a basis of co-operative production. They were, however, forced to admit that nothing could be done, nationally, until the " Builders' Parliament " (Grand Lodge) met in September in Manchester.

Meanwhile, in Lancashire, the storm had broken out again. The conflict had resumed in the various towns at uncertain dates. It was generally felt that the masters were evading their promises about contracting and

* C.U. Hansom to Owen, August 18, 1833.

† C.U. Liverpool Central Committee to Owen, August 20, 1833.

the workers demanded that the actual terms of contracts between " the tradesmen and their employers " be sent to the men's Clubhouses for approval. The masters were ready to fight, not merely because they saw a chance of destroying the union, but because they had found that they could not kill the system of general contracting. " Persons and public bodies " would not enter into separate contracts for plastering, joinery and so on. To this demand of the men was added, where necessary, the demand for the expulsion of blacklegs.* Both of these were demands consciously aimed at the control of industry, and enforced by the threat that if they were not conceded, the operatives would offer the public direct labour. To these were added, from place to place, certain detail demands, not always presented in the most tactful or reasonable way, as the following Liverpool letter, one out of many, shows :—

" Committee Nine o'clock May 31st
" Sir, 1833.

" We the Committee of the Operative Plasterers hav-
" ing been informed that you have had a conference with
" Messrs. Jackson and Burne relative to our claim in
" accordance with our 6th resolution and that you
" request further time to consider the propriety of con-
" forming to it, we consider that such conference has
" been for the purpose of evading our laws, which we
" are determined to have strictly obeyed.

" Therefore we consider that as you have not treated
" our Rules with that deference you ought to have done,
" we consider you highly culpable and deserving of
" being severely chastised ; looking over your past
" aggressions, and without further notice, if you do not
" comply in paying all arrears due to your men for

* *Impartial Statement.*

" Brush money this evening, we will suspend all your
" Plasterers on Monday morning until such time as you
" think proper to comply. Secretary to the Committee,
" O.L.P.
" Liverpool 1st June 1833.
" To Mr. Robert M'Kee, Queen Square."*

Thus, by " an injudicious freak of power," as the masters complained, all of the Lancashire Lodges were involved in a grave struggle. The masters answered to the attack by counter attack, and presented the Document—that paper which has appeared again and again in building trade union history. In its 1833 form it ran :—

" We, the undersigned.....do hereby
" declare that we are not in any way connected with the
" General Union of the Building Trades and that we do
" not and will not contribute to the support of such
" members of the said union as are or may be out of
" work in consequence of belonging to such union.
" June 15th 1833."†

The Operatives' answer to this was, for the moment, shattering. " Not a brick was laid for 16 weeks," complained a master.

The Grand Committee was by no means at ease in its position in conducting the strike, but it was not utterly inert as was the later Consolidated Union Committee. It was able to circumscribe the strike without destroying its effectiveness—that is to say, it secured that in most places the carpenters, joiners, masons and bricklayers should alone be officially on strike. This secured the complete cessation of all large building operations, and prevented the acceptance of any new contracts. At the

* *Master Builders*, 1846.
† *Brief History.*

same time, wherever possible, the painters, plumbers, etc., remained upon the masters' pay roll, doing whatever odd jobs of repairing that could be secured, and paying the high levies that the union imposed upon them.* There is little doubt that the Executive, inexperienced as it was in trade union administration, acted correctly in this matter. The gravest problem which the union had to face was that of finance. The central funds were not adequate to meet any strain, while the local Lodge funds would be rapidly exhausted. The only way to support a prolonged strike was to keep in work some sections of the building trades, and to rely upon levies and gifts from them. Had the union called out every man in every trade, the effect of the strike, if it lasted, would have been greater; but there was reason to believe that under such circumstances it would collapse. And the money was forthcoming; apart from the levies the Manchester builders' labourers raised £30 in 24 hours for the masons, who led the strike, while the Scottish Operative Masons sent money to Manchester amounting to between three and four hundred pounds.† The 12s. a week strike pay continued regularly for months.‡

No sooner was the Lancashire strike well under way than a further conflict was precipitated in the other great union centre—Birmingham. Hansom and Welsh had found the unionists very slack for some time. No struggle was on, and the Owenites, as the left wing, found themselves more or less "held up" for lack of anything to do, until on August 25, 1833, just at the time when some illusory signs of peace appeared in

* O.S.M. Old *Returns*, March 3, 1837.

† O.S.M. Old *Returns*, April 28, 1837, O.S.M. *Returns*, February 15, 1847.

‡ *Remarks.*

Lancashire, Messrs. Walthen, one of the largest contractors in Birmingham, discharged every man in their employment who belonged to their union.*

Instantly Birmingham was in an uproar. The Owenites' influence became paramount. A formal deputation was actually sent from the union to ask Hansom for his advice—which was, of course, to carry on the struggle and to lose no opportunity of putting the locked out men on direct labour contracts. He secured for them another small contract of £500, and, as he put it, "inducted his own carpenters, plasterers and masons" into the union.† Hansom had failed to secure the contract for the building of the new Grammar School, and a personal cause of indignation was added when just at this time the Governors of the school accepted the tender of Walthens.

Hansom's partner, Welsh, immediately sat down and drafted an address to Walthen on behalf of the operatives, which made peace (as he intended) impossible. It explains, by the demands in the last paragraph, the ultimate aims of the Builders' Union, and shows clearly why the Birmingham conflict also threatened to become a life-and-death struggle.‡ The *Pioneer* recommended that every Lodge should adopt it, with the necessary variations:—

"Sir,—We, the delegates of the several Lodges of the "Building Trades elected for the purpose of correcting "the abuses which have crept into the modes of under-"taking and transacting business, do hereby give you "notice that you will receive no assistance from the

* C.U. Hansom to Owen, August 23 and 25, 1833.

† C.U. Hansom to Owen, September 2, 1833.

‡ C.U. Welsh to Owen, September 2, 1833. No direct evidence of the adoption of this letter exists, but I assume it was sent. Welsh and Hansom were completely trusted and followed at this time.

" working men in any of our bodies to enable you to " fulfil an engagement which we understand you have " entered into with the Governors of the Free Grammar " School to erect a New School in New Street, unless " you comply with the following conditions.

" Aware that it is our labour alone that can carry into " effect what you have undertaken, we cannot but view " ourselves as parties to your engagement, if that en- " gagement is ever fulfilled ; and as you had no authority " from us to make such an engagement, nor had you any " legitimate right to barter our labour at prices fixed by " yourself, we call upon you to exhibit to our several " Lodges your detailed estimates of quantities and " prices at which you have taken the work, and we call " upon you to arrange with us a fixed percentage of " profit for your own services in conducting the building " and in finding the material on which our labour is to " be applied.

" Should we find upon examination that you have " fixed equitable prices which will not only remunerate " you for your superintendence but us for our toil, we " have no objection upon a clear understanding to " become parties to the contract and will see you " through it, after your having entered yourself a mem- " ber of our body, and after your having been duly " *elected* to occupy that office you have *assumed*."

Immediately upon this outbreak, Hansom had brought Owen himself down to Birmingham, and so general was the acquiescence in his views that a special delegate meeting of the Manchester and Birmingham Lodges was held to hear him. His reception at this meeting was such that it was perfectly clear that these two great centres of the union were " safe " from the Owenite point of view. He left Birmingham with

a letter from the Chairman and Secretary earnestly recommending him to the London operatives, and urging them to listen attentively to his proposals, which had already convinced the northerners.*

We have no record of the London meeting, but it was obviously sufficiently satisfactory to convince Owen that he could now make his final step towards the capture of the Grand Lodge, or " Builders' Parliament," that was to meet in Manchester on September 24. He therefore arranged for the calling of a special mass meeting of the Manchester Lodges to hear and adopt his plans for a Building Guild and a militant industrial policy.

The meeting met on the 12th, and a brief note of it survives.† Owen, who addressed the meeting first, confined himself to a brief summary of his proposals, which he had drawn up in the form of a constitution for the Guild—technically a most inadequate document, but the operatives were in no mood for criticism. Edward Welsh and Joseph Hansom followed, explaining the scheme in detail. After they had formally moved and seconded the adoption of the Guild, Rigby, "one of the members of the Union," supported in a speech which Owen was pleased to commend as " replete with sound valuable information." After another speech by a rank and filer the proposal was carried by acclamation. A further resolution was then passed, ordering that the proposal be sent to every Lodge of the Union for examination, with the request that they consider it before the Grand Lodge meeting and instruct their delegates how to vote upon it, as it would be submitted there.

* C.U., Carr and Laverick to the London Operative Builders in Union, August 30, 1833.

† C.U., Resolutions passed by the Manchester Lodges, September 12.

The proposals thus circulated to the Lodges were reprinted just before the meeting in the third number of the *Pioneer* (September 21), a weekly journal run by James Morrison, which was acting as the unofficial organ of the builders.* The proposals, which were based on a membership of 60,000, were for the establishment of a "Grand National Guild of Builders." This body would build directly for the public (and thus accept exactly those general contracts that the Union was fighting), provide medical service, education, and banking facilities for its members. It would be governed by a Grand National Committee, consisting of delegates from District Committees. These District Committees would be made up of delegates from the Lodge Committees. In a Catechism on the Guild, published the week before in the same journal,† it is explained that "these Lodges should, by degrees, consist of architects, masons, bricklayers, carpenters, slaters, plasterers, plumbers, glaziers, painters: and also quarriers, brickmakers, and labourers as soon as they can be prepared with better habits and more knowledge to enable them to act for themselves, assisted by the other branches who will have an overwhelming interest to improve the mind, morals, and general condition of their families in the shortest time. There should also be lodges of smiths and of all other branches connected with building that nothing may be wanted from the commencement to its completion." The slighting reference to three branches of the trade was due to the fact that labourers and quarrymen were then, and for many years remained, extremely poorly organised, while brickmaking had ever since

* Essential clauses reprinted in my *Revolution*, p. 91, with part of Owen's speech.

† *Pioneer*, p. 13.

the last century been despised and brickmakers had a reputation for violence. It was regarded as essential that all those who were quarrelsome or drunken should be kept out of the Guild.

The Guild Bank was to be supported "by all the members paying all the common money of old society which they receive weekly into the bank and its branches, and receiving in return their own Labour Notes, which may be denominated the 'Builders' Union Notes' . . . the common money of old society, thus received, should be expended to purchase, at first hand, provisions, raw material, etc., etc., and the members of the association should purchase with their Labour Notes whatever they require."

By such means the building trades would cease to be the hunting ground of innumerable small tyrants fighting among themselves, but be an organised industry, run democratically by the whole body of the operatives. Only those men would be masters who were elected to fill that post.*

At last the long expected Builders' Parliament met in Manchester on September 24. About 500 delegates arrived, and remained sitting a full week, which is said to have cost £3,000. Owen, Hansom and Welsh were in attendance and practically dominated the assembly, which turned at once to discussing Owen's scheme. Owen, describing the meeting afterwards in a lecture, said :—

"This meeting continued its deliberations for a week : "a larger number came on account of the information "which was conveyed to the different lodges that our "new plans of society would be submitted to them for "consideration. Many of them were quite novices in "the new doctrine. The assembly might be said to consist

* *Pioneer*, p. 3.

" of three classes—first, of those who were entirely " unacquainted with the new doctrine—second, of those " who were partially instructed in its principles—and " third, of those who were comparatively well informed ; " and it was most gratifying to find that the most intelli- " gent and well informed exercised the greatest in- " fluence upon the deliberations of the Council."*

The full week was taken by the explanation and discussion of Owen's proposals. Although he was satisfied with the audience as a whole, he was faced with a general body of delegates, not a selected audience, and there were certain prejudices to be overcome, which he did generally by very simple devices. When they hesitated over his scheme of " Labour notes " he merely changed the name to " builders' notes " on the lines suggested in the catechism above, and they exclaimed : " Oh, this will do—the builders' note will do." It took three days of exhausting wrangling for Owen to carry his initial point, which was the reorganisation of the union. Three delegates of each of the seven unions described previously were then appointed to carry this out, and the fruit of their labours was a decree on " universal government," whose terms are now unknown. It is clear, however, that many relics of autonomy had been left to the various societies that had made up the union, and we may presume that the effect of this " universal government " resolution was to remove these and to centralize these powers in the hands of the Grand Committee. At the same time such existing anomalies as might have arisen by the absorption of already existing local bodies were removed by the official reorganisation and regimentation of the whole of the lodges into their proper unit of the seven national branches, known as the seven

* *Crisis* III, 42

" Governments."* What other reforms were carried through by the delegates on the committee, whose mandate was " to revise the whole of the laws and regulations of the Union," we do not know. Their proposal to institute an eighth branch for architects was defeated, because Welsh and Hansom were found not to be accredited delegates of any body.

All this, however, was but the preliminary to the acceptance in full of Owen's programme, and the institution of a Builders' Guild, for which the reorganisation was only a preliminary. This whole programme was adopted and published to the world in a " Friendly Declaration." This has now been recovered, and will be found printed in full in the Appendix to this book.

It proves, what had been assumed previously without proof, that the Union actually resolved itself into a Guild. No arrangements were made for separating Guild and Union finance: the Union was the Guild, and itself directly tendered to individuals or public bodies. Arrangements were, however, made for the payment of Guild workers in sickness, old age, or accident. When on slack time they would be employed in erecting union buildings. Education would in time be provided: meanwhile the success of the Guild would prove an example to all other trades, which they would follow. The Guild itself was to be only a part of a greater Association that was to come. The manifesto closed with the wild hopes common to all Owenite documents.

* *Crisis* III, 61. The opposite to "universal government" is "exclusive government," meaning independence for each trade. These "governments" corresponded to and were based on the seven unions given in the previous chapter, of course.

The builders, Owen confessed, were really "rather exclusive," and did not genuinely want a big general Union. However, his success at Manchester was sufficient for him to abandon all his other attempts to reform the world, for the moment. "The Exchange" he exclaimed "is but a bagatelle—a mere pawnbroker's shop in comparison with the superior establishments which we shall speedily have it in our power to institute."

At the same time he fanned the struggle in Lancashire again into a flame, by persuading, wisely enough, the workers to substitute for their existing demands, the demand for an eight-hour day. Certain things that Owen did had a lasting effect on the building trades, and this was one of them. The operatives, and particularly the Masons, never forgot this lesson, that the best aim they could have was a genuine shortening of hours, and from this date onwards the exclusive preoccupation about contracting and minor working rules tends to give way to the far more important question of hours. Before Owen raised this question, the Lancashire dispute looked like ending, but by doing so he prevented them, as he boasted, "signing conditions which would have put them absolutely at the mercy of the employer."*

After the "Parliament" dispersed, the operatives found their position no more easy. Owen had rekindled an expensive dispute which had looked like ending, and at the same time he had put the largest expectations into the minds of the rank and file. He had also committed the Union to an expensive and dangerous experiment. On the other hand, he had induced them to reorganize their Union on a reasonable basis that at once added to its efficiency. He had cleared up a disjointed programme

* *Crisis* III, 61

and provided a policy by a few words of commonsense. He had brought the Union well into the public eye, and ensured a good flow of recruits. And if he had forced on the Guild experiment, few doubted that although it might have risks, there was a chance of it leading to a victory so magnificent as to surpass any expectations.

Owen himself had no doubts. Announcing the results of his week to a London audience on his return, he prophesied with confidence the coming of the new society :—

" I now (he said) give you a short outline of the great " changes which are in contemplation and which shall " come suddenly upon society like a thief in the night. " . . . All trades shall first form associations of lodges, to " consist of a convenient number for carrying on the " business ; these lodges shall be called parochial " lodges ; all individuals of the specific craft shall be- " come members and these shall include all producers of " wealth or whatever contributes to knowledge or hap- " piness. These parochial lodges shall meet weekly ; " they shall also select delegates to form county lodges " to meet monthly and these again shall select delegates " to form provincial lodges amounting to perhaps ten in " number for Great Britain. These shall superintend " the trade of the provinces and send delegates to the " grand national congress which shall probably meet in " London. This is the outline for individual trades— " they shall be arranged in companies or families."*

* *Crisis* III, 42

CHAPTER V

THE GUILD AND DEFEAT

THE EXCLUSIVES * THE GUILD BEGINS BUILDING * DIFFICULTIES OF THE GRAND COMMITTEE * THE GRAND NATIONAL CONSOLIDATED TRADES UNION * DECLINE OF THE O.B.U. COLLAPSE OF THE G.N.C.T.U. * THE "BEER" LOCK-OUT * DISSOLUTION OF THE O.B.U.

1834

AFTER Manchester, there was one tiny danger signal shown. In London and Leeds a group of union members called "the Exclusives" put forward motions for the dissolution of the union into its component societies and the reversal of the Manchester decisions. In one Liverpool carpenters' Lodge these resolutions were actually carried. The Exclusives, whose main strength lay in the carpenters' Lodges, had scarcely begun to move before they were overwhelmed by the disapprobation of all the other trades and a majority of the members of their own. Lodge meetings held all over the Midlands denounced them, and their small following in Lancashire was treated as a scab organisation by the union; no one would work with them. The *Pioneer* wrote of them: "We will give them a new name, we will call them the Pukes—it is a sickening idea—and will remind us that we are looking upon something that is filthy."* Small, however, and generally reprobated as the split was, it was a genuine warning against Owen's influence. He was forcing the pace. The

* *Pioneer*, pp. 84 and 111

rank and file of the unions were actually unable to keep up with him, and the Exclusives were good trade unionists who should have been the backbone of the union. They had merely not had time to absorb the new ideas, and wished to go back to the old craft societies that they understood. But so far from Owen taking this warning to " go slow," he was already busy upon a plan to absorb the building union in a grand general union of all trades.

The Builders' Union had enough trouble of its own. Immediately after the close of the Manchester Conference it reckoned that it had, apart from the Birmingham affair, strikes or lock-outs to support at Leeds, Worcester, Nottingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Preston —these last being the centres of the interminable Lancashire struggle—and a further conflict was threatened in London. In Liverpool, moreover, an urgent effort had to be made at once to stop the rot, for the effect of the Exclusives' action had been to start a movement to go back to work. To this task Embleton and his Committee turned eagerly. They did stop the rot in Liverpool. They put new life into the Lancashire struggle, and such vigour into the system of contributions or levies that the sum of eighteen thousand pounds was collected and paid out in strike pay.* The Lancashire building trades were once again paralysed, and it is very clear from the complaints of the masters that the Union was able to shut down practically any job it chose, without fear of blacklegs.†

The Committee further proceeded to carry out the main decision of the Manchester Conference, by instituting a Guild. Under the direction of Hansom and

* *Pioneer*, p. 139.

† *Impartial Statement.*

Welsh, plans were drawn up for the erection of a Union Institute, or Guildhall, in Birmingham. These plans were formally adopted and work begun by the Guild on November 28, on what was by far the biggest single job it had undertaken—estimated as the equivalent of a £2,000 contract.* A large procession marched to Broad Street, headed by the local band. The carpenters, bricklayers, painters, masons, slaters, plumbers, and glaziers attended in aprons and with their banners ; the labourers themselves had provided themselves with a strange banner " representing O'Connell and Polish officers, with suitable mottoes." Other trades, unconnected with building, attended and heard a speech in the pouring rain by Joseph Hansom, who laid the foundation stone. Beneath it he placed a box containing a parchment, recounting the occasion of the building and concluding : " In a confident hope, therefore, of success this work is commenced, being, as it is believed, the beginning of a new era in the condition of the whole of the working classes of the world."†

This hopeful tone marked everything that the Grand Committee attempted. The *Pioneer*, the journal devoted to the union interests, repeated at the end of the year the syndicalist revolutionary hopes that we have noticed previously. It pointed out that the control of the various industries by the workers of those industries would speedily take the reality of power away from the governing class. " See, Sir," it wrote to the Editor of the *True Sun* " into what a position this mode of pursuing things resolves itself. Every trade has its internal government in every town ; a certain number of towns

* *True Sun*, December 2, 1833.

† The building, Webb states, still stands as a warehouse in Shadwell Street.

comprise a district, and delegates from the trades in each town form a quarterly district government; delegates from the districts form the Annual Parliament; and the King of England becomes President of the Trades Unions!"*

The failure of the Builders' Union to achieve this great ideal was not due to the faults of its organisation. These are obvious: the autonomy of the Lodges was excessive, and the system of providing money for central purposes was rudimentary. Nevertheless, the organisation as a whole was better than it is to-day, ninety years later. Indeed, if an official of a building trade union to-day were offered the choice between the organisation of the trade in 1833 and its organisation in 1923, he might well prefer the former, with all its immaturity, to the muddle and chaos of the many unions of to-day, still suspicious and disunited, linked only by a Federation whose powers are limited. Nor can we blame the failure upon the rank and file. They fell away after the defeat: they were easily dispirited. But at the time they were prepared for anything, and the prolonged Lancashire strike showed that they could endure and would fight tenaciously while they had a hope of their ultimate freedom. Owen's brave words had a real justification: if they could be properly led and circumstances had been different, the rank and file were in a right mood to complete the Social Revolution.

What most crippled the building workers in this struggle was no more than inexperience in certain essential and simple trade union business matters. The Grand Committee was not inert, and it invented some quite effective forms of trade union action—for example, it won a strike in November in Pall Mall for 5s. a

* *True Sun*, December 30, 1833.

day by methods of mass picketing that have been revived quite recently with success after years of disuse. But the officers of the union had no experience in, or ability for, ordinary office work. They could not check the records of their own membership, much less administer the complicated finance of the Guild. They saw correctly at this moment that it would be most dangerous for them to let the Lancashire strike die away. It would deal a terrific blow to the credit of the union if that happened. They also saw that not to proceed immediately with the Guild scheme would dampen the enthusiasm of the rank and file, suggest that their decisions were ignored, and invite the loss of the huge inrush of members who had come in with such high hopes and wanted something done at once. Both of these objects were desirable. But the Committee was incapable of the financial calculations which would have shown them that, while they might succeed in doing one or the other, they could not do both. They might fight the Lancashire struggle out and shelve the Guild, or they might call off the Lancashire strike and go straight for the Guild. The finances of the union would not stand both expenses at once.

Innocent of any financial experience, the Committee had run itself into both enterprises, and barely a month had passed before it was in the greatest financial distress. At the end of November it issued a circular to all Lodges proposing a plan for reorganisation of finances. Money had previously been sent directly by Lodges to the towns where there were "turnouts," and there was consequently no check upon the money sent, no means of finding whether the proper levies were paid, or what use was made of the money when it arrived. No proper returns were made of membership or of strikers. As a

result, the pay of the strikers, which had been 12s. for the best part of the strike since June, had now fallen to between 4s. and 8s. They proposed, therefore, that all levies be sent direct to the Central Committee, which should share them out equitably, and concluded by rebuking the District Lodges, except Manchester, for their dilatoriness.*

No record exists by which we can tell whether this scheme was adopted. The continual disorder of the finances suggests that it was not, and the constitution of the Union does not suggest that it could have been adopted without another meeting of the Grand Lodge, which was not due till April. In any case the fate of the Union was partly taken out of the hands of Embleton and given to far less competent men, by the foundation of a greater general union at whose wheels the Builders' Union was willy-nilly dragged along.

It had been Robert Owen's intention all along that the Builders' Union should only form part of a grand national union, and that this body should be the one which would replace capitalist society. He correctly argued that an individual union could not stand by itself, and that if it attempted to do so it was actually injuring the rest of the workers. He therefore patronised and directed the formation of this grand general union of which the Builders' Union was to form part. Delegates from the innumerable societies of all trades which had sprung up met in London from February 13 to 18, and formed a union to embrace all workers of all kinds, under the imposing name of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union. Either because of the influence of the Exclusives, or from a distrust of the persons in charge of the new union, the builders disgusted Owen by holding aloof.

* Text of this circular, sole extant relic of the O.B.U., in Appendix V.

The new union very soon eclipsed the builders altogether. Its membership rose to the then amazing figure of 500,000. The *Pioneer* transferred its allegiance and became the Consolidated's official organ. The Consolidated even avenged itself for the builders' obstinacy by poaching members. It was clear to all that upon the fate of the Consolidated depended the fate of trade unionism. If the Consolidated kept up its prestige the builders' might live in its shadow. If it collapsed, the older union had no longer sufficient strength to stand alone, and would be swept away in the downfall of the colossus.

The internal affairs of the builders were in a steadily worsening condition. The Grand Committee, by the time the Consolidated was founded, had had to admit defeat in the Lancashire strike. The men had, section by section, given in and signed the document. The Builders' Union was dead in one of its main centres. More than that, the Manchester joiners and bricklayers sent round speakers and letters to other Lodges working for its dissolution.*

In Birmingham, the second centre, all attempt seriously to hamper Walthen's job had been given up and attention concentrated upon the Guildhall. The Guild had been at work upon it for some months, slowly but well. Now, in February, the work stopped. Hansom himself, in a vain appeal to Owen for assistance and advice, explains the reason for this failure :—

" With you I seek to commune, not so much relative
" to my own condition as on the topic of the Trades
" Union and most of all with regard to the Birmingham
" Operative Builders' Guildhall. It stands, it progresses
" not. To please my partner, and his friends, and the

* *Pioneer*, 228.

" Commissioners of this Town, I have for the last 6 or " 8 weeks been in Anglesey forwarding the Masons' " work at the Quarries, and it is likely that unless I take " some proper step now, that I shall be punished and " justly for my subservience—unwilling tho' it be—to a " party I can never respect but always despise, and for " my apparent abandonment of the Trades when my " presence was almost as necessary to them as the key- " stone to the Arch. It is a hard thing to choose between " Life by an accomodation of one's action to the vicious " world—and Death by an open and decided opposition " to it . . .

" It is of vital importance to the question, the grand " question, of the *Independence of Labour* and to the " Regeneration of the Country, that this project of " building the Guildhall should not be defeated. The " Men have already spent a considerable sum in labour " and I have invested also a large sum in Material—more " I cannot do—but the men can and will complete it, if " a few hundred pounds could be procured for the re- " maining materials—at the utmost £500."*

On the same day that the foundation stone of the Operative Builders' Guildhall was laid, Edward Welsh, Hansom's junior partner, had got married. From that date, his partner considered, " may be dated his decided defection from the cause of the Labourites." His marriage had made him think more of money, and he had taken advantage of Hansom's absence to seize the title deeds to the Guildhall as security for the materials the firm had advanced. Months of wrangling passed before Hansom could arrange for work to be resumed by the Guild. It is not known whether he got his £500.

* C.U. Hansom to Owen, February 23, 1834.

Meanwhile the Grand Lodge met in Birmingham in April. No record of this second "Builders' Parliament" exists: of their proceedings one scrap only remains:—"The Builders' Union at Birmingham determined to found Schools for the education of the members' children and also to establish lectures for teaching the principles of Science to any of their body who wanted to learn them."*

The events which decided the fate of the Union belong to the history of the Consolidated. Its Executive Committee had at no time had sufficient authority. "I do not think," wrote one of Owen's most intelligent correspondents, "the Council will poſseſs anything like extensive confidence. The Lodges seem surprised that the Delegates who elected them should have done so without any directions from their Constituents."† Worse than that, the Executive itself was incompetent. Its duties were not performed: they were grossly neglected. The first secretary was John Browne, a tailor, who, although utterly unfit for his duties, was honest and painstaking. Such pronouncements and such decisions as were issued by the Executive were due entirely to William Neal, apparently a middle-class sympathiser,‡ on whom Browne relied for assistance. Had it not been for Neal, who indeed drafted the plan for the Consolidated, even such small efforts towards coordination and a common programme as were made

*Knight, p. 51. I can find no record of the Manchester or Birmingham "Parliaments" in any of the newspapers of the time. Besides the *Times*, I have searched the files of the *Manchester Courier*, *Manchester Guardian*, *Manchester Herald*, *Manchester Times*, *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, *Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle*, *Birmingham Advertiser*, *Birmingham Journal*, *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*.

† C.U. Pare to Owen, April 16, 1834.

‡ Afterwards Chairman of the Amalgamated Tailors about 1860–70.

would not have occurred. All the secretarial work that was done was done by Neal in his spare minutes: the officials of the Consolidated merely idled away their time. When Browne was replaced by a cipher, a nonentity named E. C. Douglas, matters only worsened. James Morrison had left the Executive in disgust.*

Under such management, the vast membership that had drifted into the Consolidated began to drift out again. No attempt was made to check the disastrous small strikes which were dragging the Consolidated to financial ruin. No common policy was evolved. A disaster, which had been presaged by the arrest in February of 15 members of the Builders' Union for administering unlawful oaths at Exeter, struck the Consolidated in March when its delegates were sentenced to the monstrous penalty of seven years transportation for enrolling members at Tolpuddle. No reply would have been made to this had not Owen personally seen to the organisation of monster demonstrations, which, however, brought no redress.

Morrison, who had left the Executive, and his friend J. E. Smith, who edited the *Crisis*, were not yet despairing, although the strikes conducted by the Consolidated were being lost right and left. They were conducting a campaign in favour of "a long strike, a strong strike, and a strike altogether." They hoped to force upon the imbecile Executive a policy of forbidding all small strikes and gathering funds and energy for a serious general strike. Nothing, however, moved these worthies, and in April Neal wrote to Owen, who alone had the power, backing up Smith's attacks and urging him to intervene upon Smith's side.

* C.U. Neal to Owen, April 18, 1834.

Owen, however, had far other ideas. His followers had spoilt him. The adulation of the Builders' Union was as nothing to the adoration of the Consolidated, which had actually demanded adherence to his theories from its members. (" Do you fully acknowledge that labour is the source of all wealth ? And that those who labour have an unimpeachable right to secure to themselves and for their own disposal all its benefits and advantages ? ") He had begun to regard himself as infallible, and the nonentities upon the Executive pleased him just because they were too feeble to question his authority. More than that, he was heresy-hunting. He had decided to destroy Smith, because Smith did not fully believe that the " character of man was formed for and not by him," and because Smith was a clergyman of a sort and had some relics of Christianity, which were not to be tolerated. He further confused his followers by attacking Morrison for abusing the employers in the *Pioneer*, ordering him angrily and offensively to observe all love and charity. Eventually he closed down the *Crisis* to stop Smith writing, and made the Consolidated run a rival to the *Pioneer*, edited by another weak man named Lewis, with Hansom as assistant. These intrigues, together with incompetence and thefts by Executive members, completed the ruin of the Consolidated, and in May, June and July members flooded out as fast as they had flooded in, until in August the union was finally and formally wound up.

By contrast with the Consolidated the Builders' Union had almost shown powers of recuperation. Hansom in June at last managed to get the building of the Guildhall restarted, though for how long we do not know. (It was in any case abandoned and finished by the landlord

in the end.) Summer is always a better time than winter for the building operative, and the records of membership over this period actually show in some cases a slight increase. Yet it is doubtful if it could have survived the general discredit the Consolidated had brought on trade unionism. Whatever chances Embleton and his committee had of saving the union from the general ruin were utterly destroyed in July. With Manchester lost, and Birmingham exhausted, the only centre of strength left was London. Here Combe, Delafield and Company, brewers, had refused to employ any trade unionists, and in return Cubitt's operatives, who were organised by the Builders' Union,* refused to drink any of their beer. At once, by an act of unusual tyranny, Cubitt's forbade any but Combe, Delafield's beer to be brought into their yards. The men defied this

* Webb (p. 150) states that these men were organised by the Consolidated, and that this lock-out was the occasion of the fall of the Consolidated, not of the Builders. This view I followed in my *Revolution*, chapter iii. I think now, after looking more closely at the documents, that it is wrong. Mr. Webb in a letter courteously admits that he can recollect no direct authority for his statement, but points out that it is impossible to rely upon newspaper statements as to the union involved, because of the general confusion both in the Press and in men's minds. This is true, but three reasons make it (I think) certain that we are dealing with the Builders' Union in this case :—

(1) The *Statement* of the London Master Builders refers explicitly to the "Operative Builders in Union," as sending the deputation.

(2) The *Poor Man's Guardian*, reproducing the notices, etc., of the body directing the strike, reproduces the headline as "Operative Builders" and "Operative Builders' Union."

(3) The strike is carried on after the disappearance of the Consolidated into October or November, which is the period when (I consider) the Builders' Union broke down.

Cubitt's is of course the same firm that built and named Cubitt Town in the East End. Beer was brought in habitually to the masons while at work; Cubitt's forbade any but Combe, Delafield's to be brought in. Of course, the masons could do as they liked outside.

and were locked out. The dispute became general, the masters presenting the Document and the men demanding a uniform rate of wages and the dismissal of non-unionists.

Although the lock-out was supported by great enthusiasm, it was clear to everyone that anything but a quick victory meant ruin. As July passed into August, August into September, anxiety grew greater and greater. Each member of the union was expecting the end, and the break up of the union.

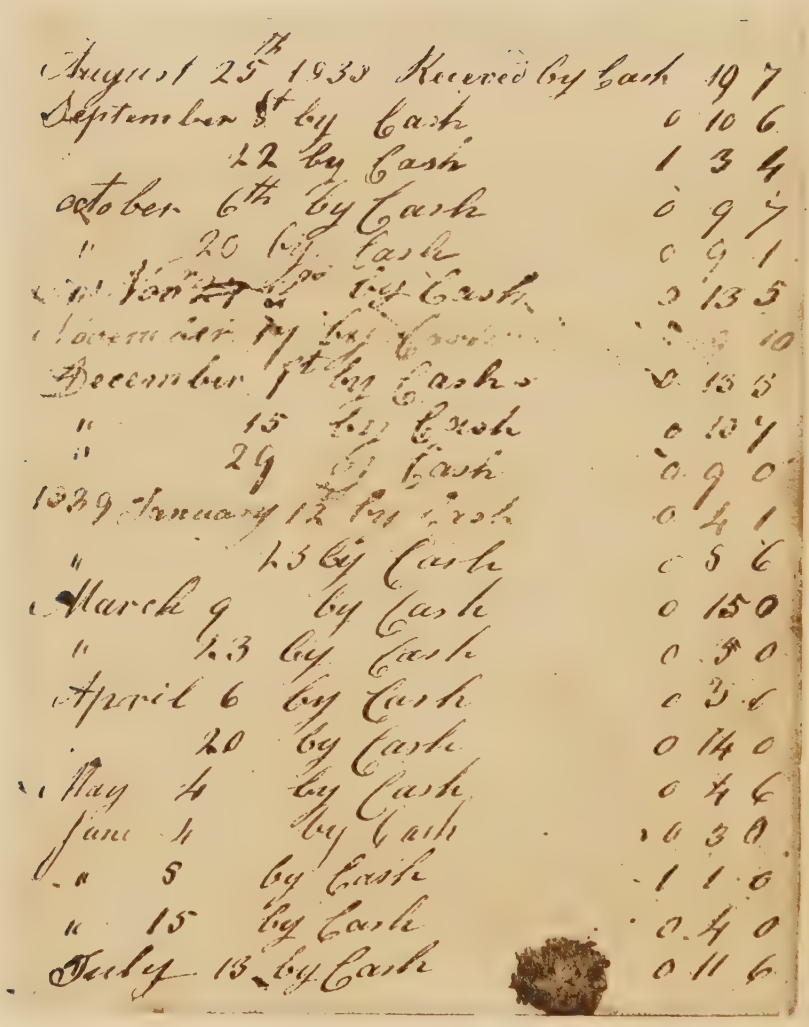
It came suddenly in September. The secretary of the masons' section was George Bevan, a Warrington man and a good writer. Specimens of his clerkly hand survive in the Warrington MS. minutes. Seeing that the end was at hand, he collected together what money he could and absconded with it—thirty-six pounds in all. This disaster gave the Exclusives their chance. At the Grand Lodge meeting in Birmingham on September 15 the nine delegates of the Masons carried a resolution "that this society do come under Exclusive Government," and Angus McGregor, the nominee of the Exclusives, took Bevan's place. Not content with separating his own society, he took steps to pull to pieces the old union: "You have no doubt," he wrote on November 28 to Manchester, "got all intelligence from London and you will like us be happy to observe the disposition they show to join us and accordingly to separate from the General Union."*

This, and the evident failure in the London dispute, settled the fate of the union. Some time in December or January it passed out of existence, the constituent bodies falling apart and going their own way. The epic of

* O.S.M. Old *Returns*, November, 1834. *Accounts*, April—October, 1834. Notice Worcester refused to leave the big society

1832 to 1834 had ended in disaster. It had not ended in dishonour: the Builders' Union had at least died game. But dead it was. It had been dragged down partly by the fall of the Consolidated, mainly by the inexperience of its own officers and members. But these after all settled only the manner and occasion of its fall: its success or non-success depended upon factors outside the control of Owen or any other leader. The economic development of Great Britain and the general circumstances of the workers made it impossible that Owen's full plans could have been realised, in spite of the fighting spirit of the rank and file. The building trade workers were in reality looking backwards: the basis of their revolutionary feeling was anger at the loss of past good conditions: they were feeling, though late, the full effects of the industrial revolution and were justly furious. But for this very reason they were not prepared to tackle the real problems with which a working-class revolutionary movement was faced. They linked hands first with the small master-craftsman in a crazy attempt to put back the progress of economic evolution. When they turned and accepted Owen's programme, the very manner in which they did so demonstrated the immaturity of the British workers. They swallowed it whole—uncritically. Some of the leaders may have a clearer conception of it, but for the rank and file it was a " system " devised for them by a " benevolent Mr. Owen." It was ready, in a box, finished, so to speak; all they had to do was to win their great strike and found their Guild, when the system would be set in operation as easily as a machine is started by pulling a lever. The programme which they put out* refers again and again to the improvement they hope for in their

* Appendix III.



August 25th 1938 Received by Cash 19 7
September 8th by Cash 0 10 6
" 22 by Cash 1 3 4
October 6th by Cash 0 9 7
" 20 by Cash 0 9 1
November 3rd by Cash 3 13 5
December 1st by Cash 0 13 5
" 15 by Cash 0 13 7
" 29 by Cash 0 9 0
1939 January 12 by Cash 0 4 1
" 23 by Cash 0 5 6
March 9 by Cash 0 15 0
" 23 by Cash 0 5 0
April 6 by Cash 0 3 6
" 20 by Cash 0 14 0
May 4 by Cash 0 4 6
June 4 by Cash 0 3 0
" 8 by Cash 1 1 6
" 15 by Cash 0 4 0
July 13 by Cash 0 11 6

WARRINGTON STONEMASONS' MINUTE BOOK

The same book as that reproduced before. A chance page after the débacle. Notice the change.

condition, which will make them free men again : but of methods, or indeed of the need to consider methods, they have no idea.

The inexpertness of their leaders determined the manner of the fall and its completeness. The union in more skilful hands could have survived, diminished in numbers and shorn of its enormous programme. The crash of its fall meant that much more was destroyed than need have been, and the marks of permanent effect on the industry are less than might have been. Certain definite achievements, however, still lie to the credit of the union. It gave the building workers a lesson in solidarity that they did not forget for a long time. Right up until 1840, we may notice, the Exclusives in the masons felt it necessary to pass the resolution, "That we be under exclusive government for the next twelve months," so strong was the feeling that there should be one union for the building industry. It provided the operatives in the various crafts with a form of organisation which remained the standard for many years, and was not permanently superseded until about 1860. It taught them that the main question to fight about was the shortening of hours ; and steadily thenceforward, until the reconstruction of trade unionism in 1860–70 we find the building trade workers turning their main attention, whenever they can, to a shortening of hours, which is indeed the only trade union gain that is ever permanent.

Finally the union impressed upon them, though in a vague and uncertain manner, that they could free themselves only by a revolution—by getting themselves control of their jobs. At intervals henceforward proposals of a more or less inadequate kind are made towards this end : co-operative production is even started ; but the

ideal, never really understood, fades away, and when the time of revival comes in 1860 it has been utterly forgotten.

CHAPTER VI

AFTER THE STORM

END OF THE PAINTERS, PLASTERERS AND SLATERS * OTHERS IN DECLINE * SCOTTISH UNIONS * THE OPERATIVE STONEMASONS * PRUDENT POLICY * THOMAS SHORTT * SAWYERS' UNION * HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT STRUCK * SHORTT'S FALL * 1846 ADVANCE MOVEMENT * PLUMBERS COLLAPSE * BRICKLAYERS FALL APART * SCOTTISH MASONS COLLAPSE * THE O.S.M. ALONE

1835–1847

OT all the craft unions escaped alive, like the Stonemasons, from the storm which had wrecked the Builders' Union. Some of them went down with it. The Plasterers' national organisation disappeared entirely, so that we cannot say whether it survived the great union by a year, a month, or at all. The Painters' organisation collapsed so swiftly and completely that all traces and tradition of it were lost. The Painters remained organised in local clubs only, and it was nearly a quarter of a century before they could be induced to make even the smallest step towards better organisation. The Slaters' fate was even worse. Not only did their organisation, national and local, disappear, but the possibility of organisation, their very existence as a trade, was threatened. Slating, in England, in the absence of a Union, ceased to be a special trade, and became the prey of jobbing plasterers or bricklayers. These private pirates would tender for a job of slating, on a piecework principle, and would rush it through themselves, careless of union regulations. In an undated

complaint, which might, indeed, have been made at any time in the next fifty years, the Slaters ask:* "Do the Bricklayers aim at extinguishing us altogether? They roam all over a building from the cellar to the highest point, devouring everything and anything they choose, no matter what other trade it may belong to—slating, roof tiling, wall-tiling, floor tiling, paving, etc." Before long it had been forgotten that slating had ever been a separate trade, or the slaters formed a separate organisation. Till quite recently, a slater was regarded as a type of plasterer.†

These three craft organisations were swept away as if a cyclone had passed: the organisations that remained were half-wrecked, torn and exhausted, while a few members remained terrified within them, "hoping," as McGregor wrote to the Lodges, "that this fortnight shall go over our heads in peace."‡ The organisations of the Plumbers, Masons, Carpenters and Bricklayers survived, in a truncated and maimed condition. The great influx that had raised the membership of the General Union of Carpenters from 900 to nearly 7,000, fell away, leaving it to pursue its original obscure path. Of the Bricklayers, the organisation later called the Manchester Unity, we know nothing: it is ten years before we hear of them again, and then they are in very low water. Local societies as much as national fell to pieces. The 114 members of the Warrington Masons fell to 17 at the end of 1834. The Preston joiners found their "Whole Ballance" at the beginning of 1835 was only £23, and from that time forward nearly all their expenditure is

* *Webb*, I.D. II 515. Some time prior to 1893.

† In Scotland, a jobbing general builder called himself a slater, and we find slaters encroaching on bricklayers and others.

‡ O.S.M. Old *Returns*, October, 1834.

again entered as " Cash pade for Ale." In both these cases there is a significant change in writing: the minute and cash books are no longer kept tidily by someone who has a pride in the Union, but slovenly by someone who cares very little for his job. The Glasgow Bricklayers found that barely 15 per cent. of their nominal 101 members paid in 1835, and they too abandoned nearly all activities till about 1844. The Plumbers' national society—O.P.G.—in Manchester recorded very few entries after 1834, and its membership figures for the Manchester 1 Lodge fell from 85 to 48. That they did not fall farther was due to the efforts of a small group of men, led by Arthur Higgins and another Robert Owen, who continually took upon themselves the hard work of reorganisation which everyone else shrank from. The Stonemasons, in Birmingham, perhaps suffered least, but their membership fell from 3,650 to 1,678.

A similar fate attended the Scottish unions. These had not formed part of the Builders' Union, but their history was much the same. The ground had been prepared since 1830 by a personal follower of Robert Owen, Alexander Campbell, a joiner or a glazier. His journal* had a circulation of 1,250 in Glasgow, rising in two months to 4,514. It was owned and controlled by the Glasgow United Committee of Trades and was conducted so as " never to lose sight of the grand ultimatum—A CONSOLIDATED UNION " (Dec., 1830). In 1831 he made a start with a consolidated union, subdivided into trades, for Glasgow only—a curious experiment repeated twenty years later. It was called " The Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for the Protection of Labour," and later the " General Union of Glasgow."

* *The Herald to the Trades Advocate*, q.v.

It was founded in the autumn of 1831, and at the same time was founded the Operative Slaters' Union, with co-operative production as one of its objects.

What happened to the General Union is uncertain, but the records of the Glasgow Bricklayers show us that the Scots union shared in the general inrush of members. A Graniteworkers' union was formed in Aberdeen, breaking up in 1835, as is shown by a note of the formation later of a Scottish Operative Masons' lodge there, when " it was agreed that members of the former union which was brock up in 1835 suld be admited entry free untill the first of February 1837."* The national Scottish United Operative Masons' Society was instituted in October, 1831, and partook of the general prosperity, enforcing in 1833 rules against taskwork and truck and for fortnightly (instead of monthly) payment and a 60-hour week.† In November, 1833, the Glasgow lodges were involved in a serious strike, whose result would seem to have been unfavourable, for before long the society was appealing to England for money, and in 1834 all the Scottish societies were involved in the general ruin. The Stonemasons again alone survived.

The decline of unionism was not due solely to the defeat of 1834. The workers of Great Britain had not lost their revolutionary aims, but had changed their weapons. From 1838 to 1848 the years are full of the political revolutionary movement, Chartism, and into this movement, with which we are not concerned, was put the main strength of the British working class. The Unions were left aside, small and forgotten, hoping that the obscurity to which Chartism had condemned them would also save them from any inconvenient attentions

* Bowie.

† S.O.M. Returns, July, 1912.

by the Government or the employers. Though the Masons recommended the *Charter* newspaper to their members they carefully refrained from identifying themselves with the movement in any way, and refused to place their funds in O'Connor's Land bank. In fact, their only part in Chartist history is played on the other side, for on June 27th, 1839, the Lodge House of the Grand Committee gave a refuge to some Birmingham policemen who were on the run from a patrol of Chartists. A more creditable part was played by the Newcastle Lodge, which lost its banner in fighting the police at a Chartist meeting in 1839.

Meanwhile, the surviving building unions tried to recover their strength by avoiding everything that had brought ruin on the big union. Every formula that had given offence to the Government and a handle for prosecution must be cut out. Above all, no more small strikes must be permitted. You may be persecuted, was in effect the message of General Secretaries to their members, the foreman may be a tyrant: never mind, shut your mouth till better times come. The conservative Carpenters adopted a rule that no Lodge might strike for a new privilege when 1 in 50 of the society were already "out."* Angus McGregor informed all the Masons' Lodges that "the Grand Committee are proud of the cautious conduct of the Brothers of Todmorden" in not striking under great provocation, and as late as 1844 the Central Committee asked, "When will our caution against strikes have the desired effect? Will our members never be convinced of their destructive tendency, and abandon the thought, or will they continue to cut off every sprout of prosperity as it makes its appearance amongst us? . . . Can anything be more stupid

* *Master Builders*, 1846.

than for men to think that they can command by ulterior measures a greater price for their labour than the current price of their locality, except by a general union and co-operation, or unless labour is at a premium; and yet in our present state, we have our members striking in places surrounded by hundreds of our fraternity not in Union."*

The Liverpool Masons moved that "all regalia, initiations and passwords" be discontinued, and later this was followed by the destruction of all records of any kind prior to 1840. Fortunately, Manchester kept its records, and from them we learn that in Lodge ceremonies it was decided "the prayer shall be dispensed with, the hand placed upon the rules instead of the breast, and all signs except the inward sign be omitted."† A further attempt to placate the authorities was made by requiring every new member to renounce the use of force against non-unionists.

Angus McGregor was an experienced, if narrow, Trade Unionist of an old school, and in his hands the Stonemasons' Society recovered before any of the others. He was a simple and straightforward man. He asked, for example, whether the Society thought his wages should be reduced when he saved his labour by substituting a printed for a MS. *Return* (circular to Lodges), hoping that the innovation would "improve the morals as well as the condition of the Masons." His wages were not touched, and he continued in his position. He was able to report throughout 1836 the gaining of several small local strikes, and added that "the Blacks are daily again returning within the pale of the Society." The General Meeting of 1836 decided to readmit those

* O.S.M. Old *Returns*, March, 1835, September, 1844.

† O.S.M. *Rules*, 1836.

who had signed the Document in London if they paid up arrears since " the Masons came under exclusive government." It also decided to reduce the arrears of the Lancashire districts in view of their suffering in 1833. By such measures the Masons recovered their strength so far that when one Hargraves, of Accrington, attempted to reintroduce the document in February, 1837, he found it advisable to withdraw it again quietly. The Masons' membership had by then again reached 3,611.*

McGregor also introduced a trade union weapon that was extended and used very freely afterwards—the black list. This was a list of members who had been " published " for working against the interests of the Society, for non-payment of fines or for some other offence, and the object of the list was to warn members against them, so that if possible they might be prevented from working. Men named in it were identified carefully by their nickname or peculiarities, so that they might not escape, as " Taylor, William, *Pugnose;* White, John, *Duck's Eye.*" Of one it was written, " Thos. Blackburn—This individual was so enraged at his offence that he attempted to commit suicide by hanging himself." In view of the violent habits of the building workers of those days, one entry in black letters is ominous : " Collett, Wm. (the spy is dead)." This system of " publishing " was carried on till 1857, when the list had reached the unwieldy length of 3,120 names.

In spite of continual small thefts by Lodge secretaries, McGregor, and James Rennie who succeeded him on his resignation in 1836,† carried the Society forward to prosperity. They insisted, in and out of season, upon the

* O.S.M. Accounts, 1836, and Old *Returns*, various dates.

† He was presented with a gold snuff box for his services. He was the only O.S.M. secretary, of the first five, who ended his office term in peace.

need for regular payments of subscriptions, and upon the importance of the benefit or friendly side of the Society. Recording the death of a brother out of benefit, the Secretary remarks, "In the midst of life we are in death and it is most unwise to fall into arrears"; and again, "✠ Simon Farley, killed by a ballast engine. Friends not entitled to funeral gift. When will members endeavour to keep clear on the books of our Society? There is no telling what each day may bring forth." Under their hands the membership had risen to 4,953 when Rennie resigned in 1838, after fierce attacks upon him for his conservative attitude.

The candidate selected to replace him was chosen partly for his personal ability and partly because of his well-known adherence to the larger Owenite views of solidarity that Rennie and McGregor had despised. The history of Thomas Shortt, the new secretary, is one of the minor tragedies of building trade unionism. He was placed in charge of a forward policy in which he himself firmly believed, at a time when the membership had rightly perceived that the occasion had come when some of the lost ground should be recovered. He assumed office at a time when the Masons' society was incontestably at the head of building trades unionism. The Plumbers' organisation was dwindling into a federation of Lancashire clubs, the Bricklayers were in desperate straits, while the General Union of Carpenters seems to have fallen into one of those long periods of inertia which characterize that curious body. Only the Stonemasons possessed a genuine national organisation, strong in membership and financially sound. When he took over, the Masons in Union were "about 60 per cent. of the whole fraternity." It was not the weakness of his instrument that ruined Thomas Shortt. Nor was it

his own deficiencies as a Trade Union leader that destroyed him. He had the handling of a very important strike, which excited the attention of the whole nation, and he showed in so doing talents considerably above the average. He brought the executive round to making a sensible decision upon the thorny question of Ireland. He handled, on the whole creditably, the inter-union differences which he first had to face. The hesitations of his members prevented him from starting any experiments in co-operative production, which he might have mismanaged.

Ultimately, he fell for reasons which were personal, some of which might have pulled down any other mason, bricklayer, or carpenter who was called suddenly to leave his trade and turn to office work, with its different temptations. Shortt had certain personal weaknesses, and a lack of firmness and moral courage, which became ruinous in his new position. It was not that he did not recognize them. Far from it: he continually tried to pull himself together. "By the abandonment of the taproom," he wrote in 1841, "and freedom from its consequence, I have a little time which until I so resolved WAS WORSE THAN LOST." But it was no more than a wish: capable and decisive in Union matters, he was weak-willed and uncertain in all personal temptation.

It is true also that he was dogged by spite. It seems that he had certain mannerisms or habits that got him easily disliked. He first, indeed, comes into our notice as exciting the anger of a fellow mason. Henry Versus, in December, 1836, was "published" as a "Viper," a "Black Reptile" who not merely failed to pay his arrears but "pulled Brother Shortt by the Nose, &c.," driving him from the public-house. Throughout his career he was persecuted by a clique which suspected

and hated him, saying " his very nature was mixed up with falsehood and slander," not so much because they really knew his faults but because the Manchester men always had a grievance when their Lodge did not form the seat of government, which changed every year.*

The position of Shortt gave him considerable power. He was elected by the society as a whole, while the Central Committee was merely elected by the Lodges of the town that happened to be the seat of government. He had the advantage of a larger electorate, and a greater moral authority : moreover, though the Committee could suspend him it could not dismiss him. He had the further advantage of permanence ; his Committee was changed every year, while he might quite easily retain his office for a lifetime.

His first preoccupation was with the restoration of some sense of solidarity to the building trades. The rules pledged his society to aid " all Building Trades in Union on legal strike making application for our support," but the pledge had by no means always been observed. He made approaches to the Bricklayers, and at the beginning of 1839 induced the society to support the Liverpool Bricklayers on strike. In May of the same year he claimed a return of the kindness from the Bricklayers E.C., concerning a strike in Bristol. Wallers belonging to the Bricklayers' society, it appeared, were doing work that was not only black, but was properly masons' work. This dispute, the first of an interminable series of wasteful and imbecile demarcation disputes, dragged on for many weeks. The Bricklayers continued to send evasive replies to Shortt until they had provided sufficient blackleg labour to do the job without the

* Of course the same Lodge could be re-chosen. But it had to change at the end of three years.

masons. It speaks well for Shortt's broadmindedness that he did not support the proposal then put forward by London to start a campaign of "poaching" the wallers from the Bricklayers' society.*

Checked in his desire in this direction, he did not abandon his hopes for a general strengthening of the society. He announced that they would resume the struggle for an 8-hour day.† He made easy enemies by telling the London Lodges in January, 1839, that their proposal to work ten hours in the winter ("Will they light candles?") was "imbecile and mean-spirited." In August he urged upon the Society a Newcastle scheme for a small beginning of a building guild, pointing out that, "as the original possessors of capital," the society could be the sole contractor. No attention was paid to him till Newcastle in the same month next year (1840) urged the abandonment of all strikes and the turning of the society into a pure industrial co-operative body, confining itself to contracting: as "IT IS BY LABOUR AND BY LABOUR ALONE THAT ALL WEALTH IS PROVIDED." To this the Society answered through Manchester that it was "a wild and visionary scheme," and Shortt was sufficiently discouraged to let the matter pass for another year, when he again proposed a "Building and Contracting Association." His credit then, however, was on the decline, and he was ignored.

In March, 1840, he persuaded the Executive to a drastic step with regard to Ireland: he induced them to cut the Irish Lodges out of the Society altogether. The relations of the society with the Irish society were thoroughly bad: the members of the two societies

* References for Shortt's career are from the O.S.M. Old *Returns*, under the dates in question.

† O.S.M. Old *Returns*, March, 1841.

quarrelled in Ireland, while the Irish society sent blacklegs over to English jobs. This same year they wrote to Shortt that unless their members were admitted free "we will whiten some of your jobs for you with IRISH VOLUNTEERS."* In taking this decision, Shortt's committee was probably choosing the best way out of a dilemma which has faced all building unions. Irish branches have never been paying propositions; they have in most cases been extremely expensive to the societies that started them. The A.S.C. and J., indeed, has been the only building trade union that has had any considerable number of Irish members and has retained them over a long period. More than that, O'Connell's House of Commons Committee in 1838 showed that the violence of the Irishmen was not merely confined to blacklegs. The local Dublin society of Carpenters beat any members of the General Union who tried to work in the town. The Sawyers had murdered an intruder. The Bricklayers' Society in England in effect backed down and gave way to the Irish by admitting the secretary of the local society into their union, so that he was their representative and official judge of whether it was expedient for bricklayers to go to Ireland in search of work.†

Just at the end of this year public attention was rudely called to the Union in a branch of the building trade which was soon to pass out of existence. If it had not been for an accidental preservation of some newspaper cuttings we should not have known of the existence of a Sawyers' Union on a national scale.‡ In December,

* Nothing is known of the history of the Irish O.S.M. It had been extinct "for years" in 1889.

† 1838 Committee, 142, 147.

‡ Place B.

1840, the inhabitants of Ashton were alarmed by the murder of a sawyer named Cooper. He and his brother were blacklegs, and had taken the place of sawyers who had struck against a reduction. No sooner had they entered the pit than they were fired upon by an unseen man or men, with a blunderbuss. One was killed, and the other injured. Suspicion pointed strongly towards the local sawyers' society, whose secretary and president were at once arrested. Before long the numbers arrested had risen as high as nineteen.

The boxes of the secretary and president showed that their society was only a branch of a "General Representative Union." This hitherto unsuspected body had its seat of Government in London and covered Lancashire and other districts. It was able to guarantee 1s. 8d. a day strike pay. It adhered strongly to old customs and to the initiation mummery that other societies were dropping. The newspapers recorded with a thrill of terror that entrants were shown a skeleton and told:

"Here are the eyes that ceased to glare,
"Here is the bosom that ceased to beat,
"Here is death's emblem; so beware
"Of treachery, or view your fate."

They also stated that there was proof that the Union had previously beaten a blackleg to death. Nevertheless, there was very great difficulty in getting evidence: informers could not be found: and it seems as though the case in the end dropped for lack of evidence.

This was the last notice of a Sawyers' Union. Of its fate there seems no doubt. Sawing by hand—"pitsawing"—was driven out by machinery. No exact date can be fixed for the change. The process was gradual, and pitsawing lingered for a long time in backward districts and small shops. But during the next thirty years

it was gradually replaced, for the larger jobs, by machine sawing, and every trace of trade unionism disappeared in the industry until in 1866 eighty Birmingham men made a new start with the Mill Sawyers' Union.

Meanwhile, Shortt of the Masons had met his first troubles and scored his first victory. The delegate meeting of 1840 had agreed with him upon the need for amalgamating the sick and trade funds, which he hoped would strengthen the Society, and had also made certain changes which materially increased the powers of the Head Office. A flat subscription of 6d. a week was enforced, and not merely were the bulk of funds centralised, but all cash books and contribution cards were to be issued from Head Office, and no Lodge could keep its own books as it liked.

The result of this conference was a violent explosion against Shortt. Manchester alleged that a man of bad character had been seated by him at Conference, and that he was taking more than the correct amount of wages. It passed and circularised to Lodges its celebrated resolution that "Shortt's very nature is mixed up with falsehood and slander." This " personal and malignant vindictiveness," as Shortt called it, was supported by the Lodges of Hebden Bridge, Worsley and Colne. At the same time, some of the London Lodges, who had protested against Shortt's suppression of some of their resolutions, broke away and formed what was nicknamed the " Antisociety," putting forward as excuses not merely the continued penalties on men who had signed the Document six years before, but the spending of money on " tramps " (in which London, as a self-contained unit, was not interested) and, most significant of all, the support of provincial strikes. In answer to this double attack, Shortt played his favourite card. He

solemnly sent in his resignation to the Central Committee, which begged him to withdraw it. This, after a due interval, he did. He correctly estimated that the violence of the language of the Manchester clique had lost them their case. When he pointed out that these Simon Pures had got their own Lodge accounts into an unpleasant mess, they were overwhelmed by the disapproval of the rest. The faithful Newcastle Lodge in particular described the Manchester action as "shameful and unmanly," and advised those people who had been unwise enough to claim to be the "Strong Right Arm" of the Society to go and "get rid of their own filth." As a result, Manchester was deprived of its position as a District Lodge.

With the London breakaway he proceeded more carefully, and negotiations were carried on throughout the year. These did not result in formal reunion, but when the seat of government was moved to London in 1841 the Antisociety faded away.

It was just as well that it did, for in the autumn of that year the Society was plunged into the most terrific struggle that it ever had had to bear alone. It was a fight that in magnitude and dramatic character compared only with the Carpenters' attempt in 1825 to stop the building of Buckingham Palace. The Society declared "black" the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament, Woolwich Dockyard, and the erection of Nelson's Column. Grissell and Peto were the contractors, and the strike was called against their bullying foreman, named Allen, "a man who damns, blasts, and curses at every turn." Now Shortt was in his element. It was, in effect, a fight with the Government, and the very difficulty of the task spurred him on. He got out a regular bulletin, giving details of the strike and of the wickedness

of Grissell and Peto. Large glaring posters, printed in red and blue and black, put the men's case from every corner. Big mass meetings were arranged in London Halls. For one he got a Radical M.P., Wakley, who promised his voice in the House and opened a subscription list: for another, the great Chartist Feargus O'Connor, who would pack any hall in the British Isles. He booked the Royal Victoria Theatre for a performance at which striking masons recited bad verse in celebration of their cause. He bled the provincial Lodges white for money. He induced all the building trades of London to unite in a Committee to support the masons. From them he got addresses and circulars which caused the formation of twenty-one similar committees in the provinces. He collected by these means a total fund of nearly £5,000.

The strike was called in September, 1841, and went on until the end of May next year. Without Shortt's astonishing activity the masons would have been quickly defeated. He created such a furore that London rang with it. The rights and wrongs of the masons, the exact oaths used by Allen, were canvassed everywhere. Comic papers cartooned the paralysed Column. Indeed, for weeks Shortt was able to stop its progress altogether, and the few blacklegs who arrived did more damage than work. Yet it soon became clear to him that the odds were impossible, and with the beginning of the new year he abandoned any real hope of securing Allen's dismissal and arranged for re-employment of the strikers. All these had got work in May, and the strike was declared off. Blackleg labour had for some time been working on the Column, and the most famous monument to the British Empire is, suitably enough, built by scab labour. All that could be said was that defeat was not absolute.

The struggle had exhausted the Society. Its funds were all but ended. The provinces had been squeezed till they could bear no more. Members had run out until there were no more than 2,144 on the books. Everyone was in a tired and quarrelsome state. Shortt had been again accused of fraud in December, and had again had to play his resignation card—once more successfully. Yet he could not shake off his attackers. He wanted 38s. a week for his double job as Secretary to the Society and to the London district. He declared (February, 1842) that he would resign without it. "I will not work black for the Society any more than I would for Grissell and Peto." The Manchester clique, alleging the depressed condition of the Society, was determined that he should not get it, and the squabble fills a whole year's *Returns*. Not only did Shortt not get his 38s., but in January of 1843 Manchester Lodge tabled a motion for the Delegate Meeting to bring his wages down to 30s., in a form which, if ever words did, indicated personal spite. Shortt's position was extremely difficult. He had a wife and children : London was far dearer than Birmingham, and he could not live on 30s. He had just spent himself freely for the Society and this spite was his reward. Yet he did not resign. It was five years now since he had worked at his trade, and he took what seemed an easier way out.

The 1843 Conference when it met in June did but little. Only seven delegates attended. They undid the amalgamation of trade and sick funds, making the latter optional. They destroyed the district lodges as a category, because they no longer served a useful purpose, with finance centralised. What did result from the Conference was the election by London of a new Committee, which demanded to see Shortt's accounts. He tried

blustering and tried whining, and in the end refused to show them. The books were fetched, and showed signs of pilfering. George Bevan had brazenly laid hands on all he could: Shortt, pressed by need, had shamefacedly taken five shillings now and again. The whole pitiable amount did not total four pounds.

Carter, a nonentity, took his place, and the seat of government was next year removed to Liverpool. For a while the Stonemasons' organisation remained quiet, living a sort of vegetable life while it recovered its strength. In the same period, another national organisation was in even worse difficulties. The Masons at least so far recovered that they had 4,861 members in 1845: the Bricklayers had a membership that never rose above 2,000. These members were almost entirely grouped round the two centres of Manchester and London. A map of organisation in bricklaying in 1844 would have shown some white dots round Manchester and London, while the Midlands, the North-East, Lincoln, Cumberland, Yorkshire, Wales, East Anglia and the South of England would be unrelieved black.* Their finances were in such a condition that they thanked the Masons effusively for the gift of £30, saying, "although the amount is small when divided among our clamorous creditors, yet it is more than sufficient to warrant our indulging in the hope that we may yet be rescued from the impending calamity which has long and seriously threatened our annihilation."†

Nevertheless, there were some distinct signs of recovery in trade unionism. Local societies began to be more active. The Glasgow Bricklayers from 1844 onwards were able to forbid piecework and to enforce

* For all this see Unity Accounts.

† O.S.M. *Returns*, August, 1844.

their apprenticeship regulations. They had collected funds amounting to £8 4s. per member.* Another sign of the same recovery was the foundation of the "National Association of United Trades," a general federation of Unions, whose period of strength is the two years 1845 and 1846. Its history belongs mainly to General Trade Union history, although the General Union of Carpenters may have joined it. It had influence on building trade unionism only because it organised zealously builders' labourers. Craftsmen had previously affected to despise the labourer, but the bricklayer knew quite well that there were plenty of builders' labourers who could if they chose take his place in a strike. The sight of so many labourers' lodges springing up gave a feeling of real confidence.

The Operative Plumbers and Glaziers, the national union whose headquarters were in Manchester, was well on the way to recovery. It does not seem that the Society extended much beyond the north of England: with the exception of one entry of money from London and of a Birmingham Lodge, we hear only of Lodges at "Rochdale, Liverpool, Halifax, Blackburn, Sheffield, Bess's oth Barn," etc. The Plumbers alone of building unions certainly joined the National Association, and levied themselves for its support. They had a membership of about 1,000—not so very small, considering that plumbing is not a large trade. They enforced a rule expelling any member taking piecework. Their internal organisation seems to have been much like that of the Masons. The "seat of government" had much less tendency to move: it had been at Rochdale in 1837, but for the next 14 years remained in Manchester. Otherwise they retained many of the characteristics of

* Glasgow Bricklayers.

Trade Unionism before Owen's day, including ale-drinking. ("1845. May 10. Committee drink 15s. 6d. Officers' drink 12s." If this was beer at 2d. a pint it seems to show plumbing was a thirsty trade, for the rules—discussed previously—provided that "no person of idle or dissipated habits can be admitted a member of this Association.") It is not possible to disentangle, by the records, the finances of the Manchester Lodge from those of the Society as a whole, but it appears that in this year the Lodge had a reserve fund of £122, which seemed to it a sum justifying immediate forward action.*

It was the ill-advised confidence of the Plumbers, it would appear, that precipitated the offensive of 1846. The Manchester Lodge published on May 1st, 1845, a proclamation that too many apprentices were being kept and that the limit was to be "any master keeping their men regular winter and summer to be allowed 2 apprentices." Negotiations over this kept them busy the whole autumn, till on September 8th the Lodge approached the Central Committee with a proposal for a comprehensive strike "for wages and Apprentices and against Working for any builders finding there own Lead, Glaſs or any other materials belonging to our trade." This was held up for the moment by the Committee till they could find out "wether the other trades will support us."†

The event shows that they had favourable replies from the Bricklayers, the joiners, and the local painters. The body, however, which from its strength had the final say

* O.P.Q.R., 1895, and Plumbers' Cashbook II.

† Plumbers' Minutes and Cashbook II. A further indication of the primitive character of this union is its minute upon the Coronation. It decided to join in the procession in formal dress with white aprons and flags; further, that anyone intoxicated on that day should be fined 2*s.* 6*d.* This last minute to be reread every Lodge night till the great day.

was the Masons' Central Committee in Liverpool. The Society was, if not yet completely recovered, at least convalescent. It was not inclined rashly to support other trades—it had turned down the joiners of Ashton-under-Lyne, telling them to ask the General Union, and it had refused to join the National Association. Yet when the Manchester Lodge voted that " we have had *General Union enough* " the Central Committee queried it. It was prepared in this case to accede to the demand of the Plumbers, and to arrange for a general building strike : one trade coming out after another in an order and on occasions to be decided.* The Plumbers, therefore, called out their men at the end of 1845. Their first payment of strike pay was not made till February, 1846, as the struggle commenced with a series of easy small victories.

The reason for Liverpool's quick acquiescence is to be found in the peculiar constitution of the Masons. With a weak secretary like Carter, the Central Committee (elected by the local Lodges) became the real governing power. It tended naturally to look at things from a parochial point of view. Liverpool regarded Lancashire as its field and the rest of England as a source of funds. From this angle, it saw that the time had come when it could avenge 1833 and enforce a shortening of hours all over Lancashire. It intended to launch formally the first nine-hours movement. It prepared the ground for the acquiescence of the Society by inserting in the *Returns* long reports of Liverpool meetings to consider whether shorter hours or more wages were more desirable. John Armstrong said, "By reducing the hours of labour in the summer we shall secure plenty of employment during the winter. It has been stated by the last speaker

* *Master Builders*, 1846.

that the lives of masons are shorter than the lives of men in other trades. I am aware it is the case. I have seen young men go off very quickly. What is the cause ? The cause is hard labour . . . When a mason comes to about 40 years of age he is generally troubled with a cough—he goes to a medical man and tells his case—the doctor shakes his head and says : Well my man, I have had several cases of this sort. It is the masons' disease ; all I can do for you is to give you some temporary relief—something to ease your breast." After such propaganda only one Lodge—York—was doubtful : the rest of the Society took up the nine-hours movement with enthusiasm. The Liverpool Lodge received its authorisation and presented its demand for nine hours.

The plan of each trade dealing successive blows at the employers assumed one thing—that the employers would not see what was happening. But the events of 1833 were sufficiently fresh in their minds for them to be on the alert. The operatives, to their astonishment, created an agitation and alarm in the employers' ranks that suggested the great conflict of thirteen years before. The employers were under the impression that all the unions concerned belonged to the National Association, and that the National Association was the same as the Consolidated. They were, or pretended to be, convinced that a new revolutionary crisis was upon them. They held public meetings in which they reminded each other of the conflict of 1833, of the months in which their profits had ceased, of the indignities they had endured. At the end of March they disturbed the plans of the workers by locking out every building employee of every craft in south Lancashire, once again presenting the Document.

Both the Plumbers and Masons were forced at once to have recourse to levies. The Masons imposed a levy

of 1s. per week on every member earning over 4s. a day. Committees of all the building trades were formed in all the areas affected. But it was soon clear that the operatives had overrated their strength. Before the month of April was out, the painters, who had no national organisation to support them, were streaming back to work, followed by the joiners, whose General Union seems to have been unable to control or support them. The battle was not entirely lost, however; the Masons, Bricklayers, Plumbers, Plasterers and Labourers formed a block that it was not easy to move, while an attempt to present the Document in Birmingham was defeated within 48 hours by united lightning action. Funds were in a tolerably good condition: for of 3,000 men locked out in Liverpool all but 800 had found work elsewhere.

The employers found it prudent to arrange a compromise. They met the workers on May 27th and presented two demands—one relating to hours which was withdrawn, and the second demanding that all the crafts withdraw from "a General and National Trades Union, the masters offering no opposition to local associations." To this the men replied that only the labourers belonged to the National Association, and the masters expressed themselves satisfied. The "nine-hours" resolution of the masons was withdrawn, and the dispute called off. Immediately after, the central committee of the masons, knowing that a fresh dispute was the last thing the employers desired, astutely presented a demand for particular alleviations because of their suffering during the strike, and secured an extra shilling and half an hour off for tea. They had therefore secured not merely the great victory of the defeat of the Document, which they shared with other trades, but some very tangible benefits. Later in the year Manchester actually secured

the reinforcement of the old system of seven-year apprenticeship, and at the end of 1846 the society as a whole had 6,000 members and a reserve fund of £2,000.

It was not so with other Unions. The Plumbers had received less satisfaction from the settlement, which had not dealt with apprentices. They determined, in spite of their representatives' signature to the terms, to continue the struggle—most unwisely, for their funds were already exhausted, and they would not have been able to carry on as long as they had but for the generosity of the landlord of the public-house where the central committee met, a Mr. Whitehead. They had spent in Manchester already £600 and he had lent them another £95. They carried on as best they could until September, when their debt had risen to £142. They then accepted the fact that the strike had failed, and attempted to pull the society together. It was too late: it had fallen to pieces. Plumbers outside Manchester were not inclined to join an old-fashioned union that was burdened with debt. Mr. Whitehead was still waiting for his original £95 in 1848, and in 1849 a stormy conference of the union was held in Liverpool. Only fourteen lodges composed the society, and a fierce quarrel over finance divided them. Halfway through the conference those who held that the only way to revive the association was by lowering subscriptions, broke away and announced that their Lodges would reconstitute themselves as local societies. The remaining delegates decided that they could not support the burden of the debt and dissolved the society. Manchester accepted the inevitable and "This society recommenced as a Manchester society on July 13th, 1850."*

* See O.S.M. *Returns*, Jan.—May, 1846; O.P.Q.R., 1895, Plumbers' Cashbook II. It was called Friendly Society of Operative Plumbers of Manchester and Salford and Their Vicinities. (F.S.O.P.M.S.T.V.)

Nothing, good or bad, is heard of the General Union of Carpenters, but the next most important union was very near death. The Bricklayers' delegate meeting—of five persons and Secretary Lockett only—at the end of the strike bitterly lamented "the extraordinary and unparallelled expenditure incurred in the most unexpected manner in payment of turnouts and other consequent expenses." As a result, the finances of the Union were such that to give "an analysis of the year's accounts" would be a "needless and impolitic proceeding."* During the ensuing year they struggled deeper and deeper into the mire. They ran heavily into debt, and hypothecated assets which they had not got. In October of 1847 the expenses of the strike and of an untimely experiment of co-operative production brought them into such difficulties that they wrote from London to the Masons asking for a loan of £150, without which the society would collapse and the Trustees be arrested. The masons, who had borrowed £400 from the bricklayers in 1841, agreed after a delay. The body receiving it was the London District Lodge, which at once used it to pay sufficient of its debts to liberate the Trustees. Lockett was assigned what assets there were, and the London district voluntarily dissolved. Some members of it re-formed as a new society (April 1848), mainly, it was said, in order to evade the debt, which the masons stigmatised as "very dishonourable." The seat of Government of the general Society (which also repudiated the loan) was moved to Manchester. The two districts which had formed the Bricklayers' society fell apart into two societies, neither of which can have had much more than 1,000 members.† Thus were formed

* Unity Accounts.

† O.S.M. *Returns*, June, 1851; "The Manchester Order," by H. Pearce, *Unity Journal*, December, 1903.

the two rival groups which, under various titles, fill with their quarrels the later history of bricklaying unionism. "Manchester Order" against "London Order," and neither against the employer, crippled the bricklayers for years. The Society had for some time been confined practically to London and Manchester, and with the split of 1848 what had the possibilities of being a national organisation fell into two local societies. It looked as though the employers' hope of reducing the building operatives to "local associations" was on a fair way to realisation in England.

What information we have with regard to Scotland is even worse. Formed in 1831, the Scottish Stonemasons' Society had, as we observed, passed through the Owenite flood-tide and suffered the collapse of 1834. It recovered in the years 1836 and '37, extending itself as far as Aberdeen. Its seat of government was movable and its general organisation seems to have been weak. Most of the funds were retained by the Lodges, and the *Circular* was devoted mainly to the verbose exhortations of the secretary on general topics. Aberdeen Lodge, the only one of which we have record, was permitted to vary and transgress the "General Laws" of the society so far as to permit piecework for stone-cutters. Small successes attended the society until 1842, when unwise generosity—the gift of £500 to fight Grissell and Peto—brought it down. The gift was immediately followed by a series of domestic conflicts which drained the funds. Then Glasgow was involved in a struggle and a delegate was sent out empowered to clear the funds of all the lodges to assist the central lodge. Aberdeen shut him out and broke away, and that is the last direct evidence of the history of the society that we

have.* In 1846 the English society announced "The Scottish Operative Masons Society is almost defunct." Delegates from England had passed over its territory, opening lodges at Dundee and elsewhere without so much as noticing its existence. The English Committee suggested that as there was a group of masons in Glasgow who were prepared to make a fresh start, it would be wise to send them an experienced organiser, with funds. This was agreed to, and slowly, from 1847, a new Scots society, the creation of the English society, was built up on the English model.

* Bowie.—Since this book was written, and while it was in the hands of the printers, I have been able to get into touch with Mr. Bowie, who kindly lent me his notes and the papers of the Aberdeen Union. From these I have been able to collect more details concerning the Scottish United Operative Masons. The society was very small, the membership in 1840 is only returned as 433. Nevertheless it had at one time branches in Aberdeen, Ayr, Barrhead, Coatbridge, Dalkeith, Dumbarton, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Greenock, Kelso, Perth, Peterhead, Selkirk and Stirling. It did not extend effectively into the Highlands: it was, on the contrary, troubled by blacklegs from the north who were "as Highlen as a Pyet and as cunning as a Fox." There was a "General Fund" administered from the centre (Edinburgh in this period) in accordance with the decisions of the Annual Grand General Meeting, held generally at Glasgow. But the main funds were held by the Lodges and the business conducted by correspondence between them. Coatbridge, for example, writes to Aberdeen in 1840 for funds to enable it to strike and receives them: Glasgow writes in 1837 and is refused. When Aberdeen proposed to start a co-operative, it was indeed prevented by the society as a whole, but only because the defeated minority wrote round to the Lodges.

The National Committee who sent out the delegate in question empowered him "to uplift all the Funds from any Branch, not a Vestage to remain." He got a snap vote of 16 to 6 in favour at the Aberdeen Lodge meeting he attended, but the President called another fully-attended meeting which reversed the decision, and constituted the Aberdeen Lodge the "Northern Union of Operative Masons." A delegate was sent to the Grand General Meeting of September 6, 1842, but merely to state the position and come away.

Carter, the English Masons' secretary, was driven from office that year by the inevitable spite of Manchester, who this time complained because Carter's wife had started retailing spirits, and so might be getting too much money. He left in March, 1847, and his successor was Richard Harnott. Harnott began his long reign of power, and the new era which he opened in building unionism, amidst signs of gloom and depression. Never had disaster been so general among the building trades. His own society was the only one yet standing upright. His induction into office passed by almost unnoticed amid the excitement caused by the impudent George Bevan, who just now calmly applied for readmission to the society. Harnott's long and useful service began with every sign of neglect and every omen of disaster.

CHAPTER VII

RICHARD HARNOTT

GROWTH OF CENTRAL POWER * CO-ORDINATED POLICY * LODGE REVOLTS * HARNOTT'S VICTORY * "TRAMPING" * LEGAL TROUBLES * OTHER BUILDING UNIONS

1847–1859

RICHARD HARNOTT (1807—1872) was the first of a series of building trade union officers who occupied their posts for many years. Elected in 1847, he did not quit the service of the Masons until he died in 1872. He heads the list of long-time officials that includes George Cherry of the Plumbers, William Matkin of the General Union, Edwin Coulson of the London Order of Bricklayers, James Charles Lockett of the Manchester Order, and many others. It was inevitable, in the early history of building trade unionism, that such extended periods of office should occur. Neither a mason nor a bricklayer, nor yet a carpenter is well fitted for exacting office work, and the membership as a whole knew it. A man could not put down his tools and just walk into the job of general secretary, when the task involved enormous clerical work and was in the later years complicated by legal questions as well as "friendly" administration. Once a man of strong character took over the post of general secretary nothing but his own extreme folly was likely to unseat him. After all, McGregor, Rennie and Carter left of their own accord, and the only secretary definitely removed by the masons was the unhappy Thomas Shortt. Harnott, when he took over the post, was in for life.

Under his administration the old system of Trade Union organisation was developed as far as it possibly could be without a radical change. Every union in the building trade was then constructed upon a basis unfamiliar to us. We think, most frequently, of a Union as one body, divided for administrative purposes into branches, but essentially a unit, directed from a strong centre which is, or should be, the expression of the real voice and authority of the Union. The building trade unionists of the beginning of last century regarded their unions simply a fraternal alliance of Lodges. The Lodge was the unit, the real living body ; the Central Committee, and its secretary—whose original title with the Stonemasons was merely " Corresponding Secretary " —a mere connecting link whose functions were theoretically little more than those of a post-office. The making of such a body into an efficient industrial weapon, even according to the ideas of 1850, was a serious task.

The limitless power of the lodges had already been curtailed in some respects ; Harnott's work roughly consisted in further curtailing them until they were clipped as far as was possible under his limitations. He was not permitted, and did not try, to end the system of changing the seat of government at irregular intervals. It moved in this period to Liverpool, Leeds, Bolton, Bradford, Bristol—in fact all over the country. No permanent office : no office staff : a Central Committee entirely inexperienced and changing every year—these were Harnott's materials. Naturally, as soon as he had been in office a short while, the Central Committee of the day, elected as it was only by the local Lodges, came to rely upon the greater experience of the man elected by the whole society. Harnott was practically dictator

RICHARD HARNOTT

From the Stonemasons' Emblem

at the centre, and soon the opposing powers were merely the anarchism of the lodges and Harnott's person. When the Central Committee speaks, it is Harnott's voice: when lodges attack "our despotic C.C." it is Harnott they are aiming at.

The possession of the *Fortnightly Return* issued to members by the C.C. gave him a certain amount of power. All proposals for legislation of any kind, and all demands for a suspension of rules, either for the "deserving cases" which were the worst problem of trade union finance, or for a lodge desiring to strike on grounds not covered by the laws, appeared in the *Return*. The secretary, through the C.C., allowed himself great liberty of comment on them, and this Harnott extended. Even in 1841 the C.C. had answered a Derby demand that a proposal for "building Masons' Halls be postponed six months" with the comment: "If the brothers of Derby would only 'postpone for six months' the use of the pot and the pipe their now disordered minds would become sufficiently serene to enable them to discover the immense benefits" of Masons' Halls. Harnott exercised a greater freedom more wisely. Each proposal that he disliked was put out with a brief note indicating its disadvantages, to which the Lodge had no chance to reply. Challenged, he would reply: "Our comment is founded upon more communications than can possibly come within the limits of a lodge."* His comments were, in consequence, invariably accepted: there is indeed one case only (February, 1849—Wigan strike) where his advice was ignored by the society, on a matter of importance, and that occurred quite early on and was followed by the resignation of the Central Committee.

* O.S.M. *Returns*, March, 1852.

He kept out of the *Return* all such communications as he judged not in accordance with the laws : a further considerable weapon which his predecessors had used very little. The greatest danger to the society's funds was the continual demands by Lodges for the rules to be suspended in their particular case : in stopping or at least scotching this, Harnott earned the most dislike and did the greatest service to the society. But the society was not prepared to tolerate initiative in legislation by the centre, however regularly it approved of Harnott's comments on the projects of others. Very rarely did Harnott's committee venture to put forward a proposal of its own.

There being no national or divisional organisers, the best substitute available was developed by Harnott. This was the relatively clumsy expedient of " delegations." The news of the collapse of the Scottish O.S.M. and the declining membership in several English areas, induced the membership to consent to the sending out of " area " delegations of two or three members, one being a member of a Lodge near the " black area," one a delegate from the Central Committee. These had to be approved by the Lodges as a whole, and they then travelled on a regular missionary tour through the counties affected. This system of delegates opening lodges was new : something like it was seen in 1833, but the delegates were then only sent as a result of invitation : any missionary activities were unofficial. Harnott arranged in his first year of office delegations on the Scottish model to Yorkshire, along the new railway line to Holyhead through North Wales, to South Wales and to Cornwall, Devon and Somerset. Thirteen area delegations were sent out altogether, and at irregular intervals during Harnott's secretaryship other delegations were sent out to areas which seemed to be in difficulties.

Little actual written change was made in the constitution in Harnott's time ; the change was more subtle and noticeable mainly in the real increase of the central power. The existing law that required all money not immediately wanted by the Lodge to be forwarded to the centre, rigidly applied, gave Harnott the necessary financial control, and the vesting of the central fund in six trustees protected it adequately. The only change of importance was the removal of the power of " shelving " from the Lodges to the discretion of the whole society—which, as has been pointed out, most frequently meant the discretion of the secretary. The right to strike, except against an invasion by employers of existing conditions, having been removed, " shelving " had taken its place. A " shelved shop " was not struck : no pickets attended it and no attempts were made to bring out non-unionists. Members of the Society were simply warned not to accept work there, in the hope that the absence of skilled workers would eventually break down the master's obstinacy. This power was used too freely, and in May 1860 was withdrawn from the Lodges, in spite of the London (Pavior's Arms) protest against " this despotic C.C."

While Harnott was not able to make uniform hours or rates of wages, he took the first step towards this task in 1868 by publishing a table of hours and wages all over the country. He strengthened the society and gave it a sense of unity by publishing, for the first time regularly in the *Return*, lists of secretaries and Lodge meetings. More important yet, perhaps, was the rough regulation under his guidance of the strikes of the members. Hitherto the society's records only tell of perfectly casual and disorderly strikes at all times of the year and for all inadequately stated objects. Under Harnott's

influence begins the " seasonal " strike. It is obvious to anyone who has any knowledge of the building trades that the summer, because of the finer weather, is a better time for the building operative to strike. There is more demand for labour and his refusal will be the more felt.* It was only inefficient organisation and the capriciousness of the Lodges that had prevented the masons acting on this fact before. Now it became the regular custom in March and April for the Lodges to fill the pages of the *Return* with applications to strike for new "working rules." These were printed out in parallel columns with the old rules for the approval of the Society, and permission was given or withheld. Thus one elementary principle of strategy was gained, but there was no means of seeing that the new working rules agreed on any one principle or were in conformity with the Society's general policy, where such existed. Harnott further added to the general importance of the *Return* by publishing extracts from the masters' organ, the *Builder*, announcing what new contracts had been taken up, and thus indicating to members the best places to go to look for work.

Two other general points of policy—the nine-hour day and the question of payment by the hour—were none of Harnott's choosing, and were forced upon him by external events. Their history will be told later. But on one important point he did give a definite lead—on piecework. Piecework, in the building trade, does not merely mean work paid by the piece : it also covers subcontracting. A mason or carpenter would estimate for the erection of a small job by the piece, and employ perhaps two assistants. To this the operatives were

* "The first days of spring are come and gone, and the bricklayer's heart rejoices," wrote the General Secretary of the Manchester Unity in 1905.

opposed, and to the alternative system of extreme speeding up under time payment. Harnott wrote in the *Return* for April, 1850 :—

" It has come to our notice that tasking [piecework] is " creeping in amongst our trade in various parts of Eng- " land, yea, and in towns where the system has been " utterly abolished, for instance Liverpool, Bolton, " Warrington and its locality . . . . If there is any chance " of succeeding, grovelling employers will try on the " tasking system. Perhaps they will at first allow some- " what liberal prices : this will induce some, especially " the young ablebodied men, to engage who think they " cannot injure their constitution by any means. These " will overstretch every sinew to make as much as they " can and upon pay day they receive a *few* shillings " above the common rate of wages ; this will induce " more to join them. The system being once established " the worthy employer begins to grumble at the high " wages they are making, and a reduction of prices will " soon follow : then reduction after reduction, until it " reaches starvation ; an additional draft of ALE or " SPIRITS is then required to assist the physical power " or in other words to keep the human machine in a " state of stupor and insensible of the injuries inflicted " upon it by the unwise conductor. But corroding of " the lungs, piles, rheumatic pains and other diseases " will show themselves, which will surely convince men " of their folly, though previously deaf to the persua- " sions of their best friends to abolish such a horrible " system as piecework.

" There is another system these worthies have if they " cannot succeed in tasking their work (and we are " afraid it is still carried on) which is : they employ one " or two of those ignorant animals who are to be found

" in our order, whose only boast is how much they can " work and drink, and who glory how much they can " harass their fellow-men ; to those found to be so base " are allowed two or three shillings extra weekly wages " and a bellyful of drink ; great respect is paid to them, " the best of materials are put into their hands, every- " thing they can say or do is approved of by their em- " ployers, purposely to make them work like brutes so " as to harass others to keep up with them. The em- " ployer or foreman goes about like a *roaring lion* and " if he sees any falling behind these BRUSSARS he " roars and swears, marking them down to be paid off, " or to be paid under the current wages."

In opposing these practices the Stonemasons had the support of the other building trades. The Plumbers' and Bricklayers' societies had fought piecework ever since 1834. Builders' labourers' Lodges—what there were of them—frequently had rules against speeding up or " chasing," while the Manchester Bricklayers fined any member " running or working beyond a regular speed."* But outside the Stonemasons' society, the weakness of the unions prevented this policy being properly enforced. It was the task of the new unions growing up in London to make these rules universal.

A change in the personnel of the membership occurred at this period, though policy had no part in causing it. This was the elimination of the small master. The 1836 rules of the Stonemasons admit " any operative master " upon the same conditions as any other mason. Later the master-members were robbed of the vote and during this period they dropped out almost entirely : not through exclusion but because, as the delegation to Yorkshire found at Marsden in October of 1847, it was

* *Webb* I.D., p. 304

impossible to organise people "who are all, as they say themselves, sometimes masters and sometimes men." We should also notice the first growth of an evil craft antagonism as shown casually in the *Return*, by the insulting reference to joiners quoted later, and a strike in August, 1865, against "a *Brickey* fixing stonework."

Harnott, in his reformation of the Union, was not governed by any conscious new philosophy or opposition to Socialist or Owenite ideals such as later directed Applegarth. He was guided entirely by empirical considerations of what benefited the Union, and would have subscribed to no general statement of solidarity with the masters. He opposed Owenite plans for co-operative production only upon the grounds of their impracticability. He maintained an open mind to almost all new proposals. In 1849, when the finances of the society were in a grave state and the seven years' apprenticeship, among other safeguards, had disappeared, the *Return* was thrown open to all manner of suggestions for avoiding the expensive use of the strike weapon. Liverpool Lodge proposed that strikes be forbidden and the money consequently saved be applied to an emigration fund. Masons out of work could thus be transported to America: an artificial shortage of labour would result and wages would automatically rise. Portsmouth went one better in demanding that the word "strike" be forbidden. Bow offered the two suggestions of starting a bank or buying land. Next year, the support of "Masons' Provident Institutions" was advocated, while Knutsford advocated the buying of land in the United States. Birmingham produced an elaborate scheme for an emigration fund. "We resemble a cat in a tripe house," remarked the Manchester Lodge

unexpectedly, "surrounded with abundance of delicate food; still, because it is so plentiful, so equally good and so alike tempting we remain as it were stupid and inactive, being unable to decide where to commence or what to consume."* But Harnott's assent to, and encouragement of, this pacific policy was due not to perplexity at the numerous suggestions, but exclusively to financial difficulties. "We have been striving hard for a long time to increase our funds to be something like commensurate with our necessities," wrote Newcastle Lodge, "to effect which the masons generally have put up with infringements from their employers rather than cause a strike to destroy our rising prospects." When Harnott judged funds safe, he was as bellicose as any. "We must dispute every inch of the ground with the capitalist and not flinch one iota," he told the Society in 1852. "We must . . . bring the struggle between right and might to a speedy termination." Elsewhere he commends a strike committee in a strong position for refusing arbitration, and explicitly repudiates a Carlisle suggestion that "the idea of striking should never be entertained except as a *dernier ressort*."† Such remarks would have scandalised the school of "New Unionists" in London. But Harnott was not one of them: he had not the means to accomplish their scientific reforms, nor the philosophy that accompanied it: his ideas were limited to a checking of the "old system of 1834," by which "the society was scarcely organised, and the lodges which were few then, acted upon their own judgment. There was a recognition of each other's existence, and that was all."‡ The destruction of this was

* O.S.M. *Returns*, May, 1850.

† O.S.M. *Returns*, March, 1852, November, 1852, June, 1861.

‡ O.S.M. *Returns*, August, 1859.

the limit of Harnott's plans, but in the consequent clipping of the Lodges' wings he prepared the way for the newer form of union.

The more powerful of the Lodges did not submit to their fate without a struggle. The history of the twenty years between 1847 and 1867 is the history of continual revolts by individual lodges of importance against Harnott, and of continual successes by him. The figures of the annual election of secretary at first give him a bare majority, which rises steadily each year until he has four figures to his solitary opponent's two. His first conflict was also his only defeat; as has been mentioned, Wigan was supported at the beginning of 1849 in an " illegal " strike. In the same year, Liverpool (George IV) Lodge attacked Harnott on the ground that he had overcharged expenses. It was defeated, and was further defeated in its emigration scheme. Harnott then suppressed a letter from the Lodge on the ground that its Committee was not representative. The Lodge replied by a circular accusing the Committee of aiding " tricksters, falsehood-mongers and wilful violators of law and order." The struggle being now open between the Central Committee and this powerful Lodge, the Society came down emphatically on the secretary's side, and expelled the George IV. This Lodge tried to maintain an independent existence for a while, but found it impossible, and the individual members crept back into other Liverpool Lodges.* So far from a Lodge being able to stand on its own, the local Bristol Society, of old standing, and the last independent mason's club, voluntarily joined the larger society in this period.

The next attack, in 1851, was the old attack on wages. Manchester in vain demanded that Harnott be cut down

* O.S.M. *Returns*, July—August, 1849.

to 30s. a week, and the attack died down into day-to-day squabbles. These went steadily on and do not deserve record, until we come to the great explosion of 1863, which fills the whole year. First Burnley and then Halifax denounced the tyranny of the secretary, accusing him wildly of dishonesty and incompetence. The summer months were filled with backbiting, until the two lodges were faced by the society with the alternative of abandoning their opposition or going out into the wilderness. Here their resolution broke down, but the opposition was taken up by a stronger lodge. Manchester Lodge announced that it would retain in its possession all further subscriptions, because it had no confidence in the secretary, who had, it said, been guilty of forgery and theft. The publication of this statement in the *Return* created an uproar, and it was noticed with surprise that Harnott's iron rule had so discontented a number of Lodges that quite a group joined themselves in even so preposterous an attack on him. Thomas Thorp and Henry Faulkner, of the Manchester Lodge, excelled themselves, using such phrases as "Your abominable conduct," "Two faced Man," "You sparrow hawk," "Coward as you are," "Mawworm Harnott." The issue was not, however, in doubt; Manchester was suspended, and in November surrendered and handed over the money due. Hardly had this been arranged than the Society was alarmed by a special circular from the Central Committee which rekindled the whole struggle. It announced that the Committee had received a "small Toy Box" containing a rope ending in a noose, and the following "fiendish remarks."

"Worthy Brothers,

"Having a desire to see merit rewarded, we forward "to you the enclosed article. We are sorry that we are

" not able to secure the services of Mr. Calcraft* be-
" lieving that that gentleman would see justice done to
" Richard Harnott as he has done to many a better man.

" From those who see plainly that he is both dishonest
" and cowardly,

" Justice, Secretary."

Whether from calculation, or because they did so in fact, the members of the Central Committee appeared to take this very seriously and regard themselves and Harnott as in real danger. After a little amateur detective work they discovered a writing pad on which, during the conference, Henry Faulkner had idly scribbled an address and sketched a portrait of Harnott hanging, with the title beneath—" C.C.S. of the Operative Bullies." This, together with the writing, they claimed proved Faulkner and his friends to be the " unholy parties " responsible for the outrageous circular. They sent out a reproduction of Faulkner's scribble along with the circular.

Laughable as the incident may seem to-day, the masons were genuinely horrified by it. Resolutions poured in advocating fines for the Manchester men of £1, £2 or £3 each, or forbidding them to hold any office, or even dissolving the Lodge. Having permitted the torrent to flow awhile, the Committee intervened, counselled moderation, and readmitted Manchester, having thoroughly scared the opposition.

This was the last attack on Harnott. The Society was now obviously with him, and in 1866 he was presented with a testimonial and gifts valuing over £50, while the Carlisle Lodge exclaimed, amid general approbation :

* Public Executioner. All this from *Ropebox*.

" Let's have no false perversions,
" Or cunning low diversions,
" The tyrant's chain
" Is rent in twain
" By Harnott's wise exertions."

Even after Harnott's secretaryship, the Lodges retained an amount of power which would surprise a modern trade unionist. The *Return* remained filled with the doings, not of the C.C., but of the Lodges. Strike permits solicited or denied by lodges, fines imposed by them and to be exacted wherever the defaulters were found, names of " blacks " or " Africans " whom Lodges were to keep a sharp look out for, propositions by Lodges for levies, festivities by Lodges, and last, but most important, " tramping " information. All questions of accident benefit were referred to the whole society, not to headquarters.

Each lodge retained its own life and peculiar character, as for example the Unicorn Lodge at Drypool, Hull, which was renowned for its piety and demanded that the Society's motto should be changed to " In the Lord is all our trust," and provided a Freehold Grave in consecrated ground for the use of members.* What most of all kept the Lodge alive was, however, the " tramping "

*The Unicorn Lodge (Drypool, Hull No. 1) still retains this certificate:—
We the Brothers of Drypool (Hull) (the subscribers for the purchase of the Freehold Grave hereon mentioned) do hereby make a Gift of it to the Friendly Society of Operative Stone Masons, to be applied to the following purpose and subject to the conditions hereafter mentioned viz. for the Burial of all Brothers who coming into this Town in search of employment, may happen to die, or for the Burial of any Brother working in this Town who by sickness or adverse circumstances may be at time of Death much reduced or whose Friends not in a condition to bury them respectably, which is to be decided by a majority of the Brothers at a meeting convened for the purpose. . . . Jan. 11, 1848.
The motto suggested, and afterwards adopted, was that of the old Guild.

system. The Lodge House was the centre to which every mason walking the country looked. The supervision, aid, and on occasion discipline of these "tramps" was the most important function of the Lodge and one in which it retained the greatest latitude. The "tramp" system is now so largely forgotten, and played so important a part in early building unionism, that it is worth turning to a more detailed account of it. Henry Broadhurst, afterwards "the Stonemason's M.P.," wrote of it later* :—

"My trades union had relieving stations in nearly "every town, generally situated in one of the smaller "public houses. Two of the local masons are appointed "to act as relieving officer and bed-inspector. The duty "of the latter is to see that the beds are kept clean, in "good condition, and well aired, and the accommoda-"tion is much better than might be expected. When a "mason on tramp enters a town he finds his way to the "relieving officer and presents his card. On this card is "written the applicant's name and last permanent "address. In addition, he carries a printed ticket bearing "the stamp of the last lodge at which the traveller re-"ceived relief. He was entitled to receive a relief "allowance of one shilling for twenty miles and three-"pence for every additional ten miles traversed since "his last receipt of relief money. Thus, if fifty miles have "been covered the man receives one and ninepence "In addition, he is allowed sleeping accommodation for "at least one night, and if the town where the station is "situated is of considerable size he is entitled to two or "three nights' lodging. Besides a good bed, the pro-"prietor of the official quarters is bound to furnish "cutlery, crockery and kitchen conveniences for each

* Broadhurst, 21.

" traveller, so that the relief money can all be spent on " food. There is also no temptation to spend the small " sum received in intoxicating drink unless its re- " cipient chooses to do so. The system is so perfect that " it is a very rare occurrence for an impostor to succeed " in cheating the union. Unfortunately, the stations did " not exist everywhere, and where they were separated " by forty or fifty miles—not a rare occurrence in the " southern counties—the traveller's life becomes a hard " one. I have frequently had to provide supper, bed and " breakfast on less than a shilling, so it may be readily " imagined that my resting places were never luxurious " hotels."

Unofficial relief sometimes supplemented this. A mason reaching a town which had no relieving station, would go to whatever job was under construction, in the hope of finding work. " If, however, no hands were wanted, a friendly gossip would ensue with one or more men in the shop. If there was a society man amongst them, he would ask you whether you had your ' card,' and if this was produced it was an established custom for him to endeavour to collect what he could to assist you on your way. If it was nearing night-time, one or other of the masons would, in addition to the collection, offer you accommodation for the night, and send you off in the morning with such addition as his means or his mind might incline him to add to your possessions."*

Even this began to die in Harnott's time, for we find the Newcastle Lodge observing in March, 1852, that " the number of cards drawn is no guide to the number unemployed for tramping is gradually becoming more disliked."

* Broadhurst, 23

One great event in Harnott's career was the strike and lock-out of 1859, but this had so large an effect upon trades other than the Stonemasons, that its consideration must be postponed.

The later years of Harnott's regime were marked by a very sinister increase in legal business, which, of course, placed the Society yet more in his hands. An employer named Trego—of Grimsdale and Trego, London—attempted, in 1849, to smash a strike by indicting the striking masons for conspiracy to injure him, but the engaging of W. P. Roberts, a Chartist lawyer who had successfully fought such cases for other unions, caused him to abandon the attempt. Nevertheless, from 1854 onwards the Society was harassed more and more by legal persecution. This took two forms—the conviction of strikers for conspiracy against the master or "intimidation" of blacklegs, and the protection of pilferers of the Society's funds. Against the latter, it was generally believed that registration as a Friendly Society was a safeguard; the resurrection of the laws that permitted the former type of conviction might be hampered by the continual use of such lawyers as Roberts, who made the process of enforcing them most expensive and cumbrous for the employer.* In 1854 the Society was able to secure, through Roberts, the acquittal, on a technical point, of a striker at Doncaster, tried for intimidation, but the Recorder gave a significant indication of the minds of himself and his fellows. He openly lamented his inability to convict, and told Roberts that his point of law was "one of the most vexatious and disgusting objections I have ever heard." A similar case at York in 1856 the Society compounded.† In the lock-out of 1859

* Reasons for this revival are given in Roberts' letter quoted in a later chapter.

† O.S.M. various: Precious case.

the Society was further distressed by the conviction for intimidation of a mason named Perham, who " neither used violence nor insulting language but merely gave the simple warning : If you go to work on the strike you will be called black, and when the strike is over you will be struck against all over London." This was upheld on appeal. Better luck followed in a similar case at Fishponds in July two years after. Here the magistrates sentenced a mason for intimidation and tried to prevent him appealing. They were bullied out of it by Roberts, who took the case to a higher court and had the sentence quashed.*

As if to mark to every one the precarious nature of the protection afforded by Roberts' activities, in the same autumn the Society was defeated in the scandalous Cockfield case. This can best be described in Roberts' own words in a letter to Stonemasons in the *Return* of August, 1861 :—

" This was a series of the grossest outrages that ever
" occurred in a civilised country—oppressions so con-
" trary to law and justice that no man in his senses would
" attempt to justify or excuse them. . . .

" The men, as your committee will recollect, had been
" decoyed into a public house on a solemn assurance by
" their employer that their wages were then and there to
" be paid. When, however, they had been thoroughly
" led into the trap, a party of policemen were brought
" forward, by whom—the employer standing by and
" encouraging the outrage—the men were handcuffed
" to each other, and thus, without a word of previous
" notice, they were led through the streets and roads for
" upwards of three miles, the employer, while they were

* O.S.M. *Returns*, November, 1859, July, 1861.

" on their way, driving by in his gig and jeering at the " misery he had brought about. This was on Wednesday " the 19th June last.

" Reaching their destination at Staindrop for the " night, the men had been confined in damp cells with " neither beds nor clothing. No food—and five of them " had had no food since twelve o'clock that day. One " asked for a drink of water but was refused. It was ten " o'clock in what to the men was in a manner of speak- " ing a strange country, and there was no possibility of " obtaining legal or friendly advice.

"While at Staindrop it oozed out from the police that " the men were to be tried at seven o'clock next morning " or soon afterwards—an hour most unusual and which " precluded all hope of communicating with an attorney " before the trial. . . .

" On the next morning it was ascertained that a " magistrate—a minister of the Church—had been " obtained to sit early and go through the trial. To him " therefore your Barnard Castle secretary, Mr. Webster, " went between six and seven o'clock [to ask for a post- " ponement] . . . . The magistrate refused the post- " ponement, said the case was Mr. Weaver's, not that of " the men, that a lawyer would be of no use, etc., etc., " and all this before the case was entered into. The " request was repeated again and again, but with no " better success.

" Then the seat of trial was reached ; not the ordinary " court, but an attorney's office about twelve or thirteen " feet square. There was no public. . . . The men were " then all ' put up ' together and a sort of form of trial " was gone through. There was no defence, for there " was no one to make one. Mr. Webster, who en- " deavoured to say a word or two for the men was

" immediately turned out. The whole affair was a most
" disgraceful burlesque of the administration of justice.
" It was all over before eight o'clock. Several times an
" adjournment was asked for but as constantly refused.

" The end of it was that the magistrate, who was
" angry and excited by his early labour, said he would
" fine each of the men ten shillings."

The men refused to pay: the man of God did not care to send them to gaol on such a charge, so the employer stopped the fines from their wages. Roberts sued him for the wages and got no redress. He attempted to get a rule for a criminal case against the magistrate, and again failed.* He tried to get the conviction annulled and again failed. As if to show that this was not merely the tyranny of an obscure local magistrate, the Lord Mayor of London behaved in very much the same way in an intimidation case in 1865. The masons picketing Pritchard's, a black shop, were arrested at lunch-time on a Saturday, rushed to the Mansion House at once, and put on trial without having a chance to prepare a defence or see an adviser. As soon as they attempted to defend themselves by speaking of the mason's society, the Lord Mayor stopped them, saying " We know nothing about societies here, and if you knew less of them it would be better for you." He refused to allow them to give evidence on oath, and sentenced them all to two months' hard labour, before three o'clock had struck.

At the same time a local secretary of the General Union of Carpenters was convicted for sending a letter to an employer. The case was carried to the Court of Queen's Bench in vain. This is the document that was held to be illegal, and a proof of conspiracy :—

* O.S.M. *Returns*, November, 1861.

" Fryern Street, Bridgwater.

" Mr. Kitch—Sir—I am requested by the committee of " carpenters and joiners to give the men in your employ " notice to come out on strike against James Jordan, " unless he becomes a member of the above society— " not being in any way disrespectful to you or him, but " being compelled by the union and laws. This notice " will be carried out after the 27th instant, unless settled " in accordance with the society's laws.

" I remain yours most respectfully

" THOMAS SKINNER, Secretary."*

The stealing of money from Lodges by local officers was another growing nuisance. It was believed that registration under the Friendly Societies Act of 1855 would protect Union funds—indeed the Wolverhampton Builders' Labourers Union held that their rules by such registration acquired the force of law†—but the Stonemasons refused to register, perhaps through a dislike of depositing their rules. Consequently they had to rely on the common law.

In October, 1866, Harnott got a defaulter at Exeter punished, by having him tried for obtaining money on false pretences, but in the same month at Torquay an exactly similar case was dismissed because the society was unregistered. Next year in January the Court of Queen's Bench acquitted the treasurer of the Leeds Branch of the Boilermakers (a registered union) who had stolen £24, and laid it down that Trade Union funds were not recoverable at law, because Unions, though not illegal, were associations in restraint of trade and not to be protected. Faced with such a decision, Harnott realised that the Stonemasons' struggle must be merged

* G.U. Monthly, October, 1866.

† Higgenbotham.

in the general battle. Delegates were sent to the London conference then called, and the direction of the legal battle passed into other hands.

The history of the other building unions in this period, up to 1860—for after 1860 a new period opens for all except the masons—is brief and vague. The London Order of Bricklayers on the whole was flourishing. It had been founded by a group of twelve men meeting at the Sun Tavern, Lambeth, after the collapse of the London district of the older society. Its first meeting was on April 8th, 1848, under the presidency of William Brightwell. Henry Turff was its secretary from the beginning and gave its policy a militant direction. It had no friendly benefits. In 1851 it was involved in a struggle for the "4 o'clock Saturday" which lasted sixteen weeks, but its main success was in 1854 when it raised wages by 6d. to 5s. 6d. a day. In 1859 it had 4,000 members, but the lock-out and what was held to be Turff's incompetence lost many members, and in spite of his many services and great energy Turff was ousted by Edwin Coulson next year.*

The Manchester Order of Bricklayers had recovered a membership of 2,070†—having previously sunk to 500—and under the guidance of J. C. Lockett (succeeded to Samuel Law in 1844) a similar process of centralisation seems to have gone on, although with greater violence. Chance has preserved for us a copy of an 1855 circular issued by Lockett called *A Reply to the Circular & Refutation of the Falsehoods issued by the Imposters & Renegades of Liverpool & Bolton.* This title is justified by the contents, and the level of invective is sustained. It gives us

* Ruffell, O.B.S. Monthly, 1864, April. Direct records of the O.B.S. begin only in 1862.

† But there were 62,000 bricklayers in England. *A Reply*, p. 15.

an interesting glimpse of the methods and difficulties of an early Trade Union official. Liverpool and Bolton had seceded, because of the non-support of a strike at Stanley Docks.

"The circulars" of Liverpool and Bolton, wrote Lockett, "and the presumption that dictated their "address with so much vanity to so large a class of "persons, would have been permitted to pass into the "most complete obscurity, had the authors thereof been "content to have displayed their egotism and folly "without dragging us into the mire and the filth of their "stupid and fraudulent impositions. But . . . it has been "resolved to expose these renegades as imposters, to "crush their fallacies, to unveil their deception and to "annihilate the wilful, corrupt and malignant enormity "of their lying. In doing this we shall drag their con-"temptible compositions into an existence, and give to "them a notoriety that they could in no other way have "deserved or achieved."*

"Liars, fools and asses" were the phrases thrown between the two sides, but underneath the clamour appears clearly the same struggle between the growing power of the centre and the declining power of the Lodge. The Liverpool Lodge's charges—repudiated of course by Lockett—were that the members of the Central Council were assuming the power to make rules, were secretive about the finances of the Society, and were tyrannously refusing the right to strike. They accused the Council of concealing, if not appropriating, a large bank balance, and of forbidding all forward movements. The separate society they established soon went the way of all such.

These accusations and this pamphlet show clearly that a similar process to that carried out by Harnott was going

* *A Reply*, p. 1.

on in the Manchester Order of Bricklayers. James Charles Lockett—dates uncertain—was the man most responsible for this, but some time between 1855 and 1865 Lockett was removed by death, M. J. O'Neil took his place, and was himself succeeded by George Housley, when the seat of government was changed to Sheffield.*

The General Union of Carpenters and Joiners seems to have been in an extremely depressed condition. Fantastic conservatism has always distinguished the members of this body, and at this time they had removed even the improvements of 1833, and gone back, so far as we can gather, to their 1827 constitution. Not only were they governed by a committee elected only by the local lodge or lodges composing the seat of government, but the same lodges elected the general secretary, who had thus none of the authority of Harnott or Lockett, nominees of the whole society. Furthermore, all funds were retained by the lodges and it was forbidden for more than £500 to remain at headquarters. Under such a constitution the membership dwindled to a few hundreds—in 1850 it was 536—and whole areas were ignorant even of its existence. The London carpenters in 1860 believed it to be a local Nottingham Union. The status of carpenters and joiners had fallen very low: the masons in the *Return* spoke of them as "this apathetic class of the building trades," and quoted with malicious approval an employer who said that joiners "flinch from their principles, and if they should ask me for the four o'clock on Saturday, I will make them work till half-past five."†

* See the letter to Bolton, from the *Reply*, printed in the Appendix. Regular records only begin in 1868.

† O.S.M. *Returns*, May, 1852.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LOCK-OUT OF 1859

1860 is the year of the rebirth of the trade union movement in the building industry. During that year, or shortly before or shortly after, all the trades which had been without effective organisation—which after all included every building trade except masonry—saw the growth of a fairly effective organisation of one kind or another. Organisations which had for a long time been dead-alive and feeble, sprang into renewed strength, and in trades where all organisation had disappeared, new unions were formed. A series of fairly prosperous years had prepared the ground, and the success of a union, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (formed 1852), upon the new "amalgamated" principles had set the example of a new form of organisation. The great spread of Unionism in the building trades does not, however, come until the need of unionism had been startlingly and strikingly advertised by the great lock-out of 1859 and 1860, which arose from the " nine-hours day " movement.

The ten-hours day had been secured in London since 1834, but no further advance had been made. From time to time the Stonemasons, the only strong building union, had made attempts to reduce the length of working hours. In 1846, as we have observed, their Central Committee in Liverpool had joined in the unlucky Lancashire forward movement on the nine-hours day cry. Next year the London lodges petitioned their masters (June 11, 1847) to shorten their hours to 58½ a week—that is to say, to grant a " short Saturday." No

gain followed this, but the next two years witnessed several small strikes by the London masons for the short Saturday. In one case (Grimsdale and Trego's, September, 1848) the employer drew public attention by prosecuting twenty-one strikers for conspiracy, and then dropping the case. Most of these strikes were successful, and by 1855 masons generally in London knocked off at four o'clock on Saturdays. Other building trades generally did not. The north of England followed at the end of 1856. In October of that year a Committee was formed in Manchester of Masons, Bricklayers, Joiners, Plasterers, Painters, Paperhangers, and Masons' Labourers—thus showing a revival of a sentiment of unity which had been lost for years—to demand the short Saturday, and, after prolonged negotiations, arrangements were made by which they knocked off next summer at one o'clock on Saturdays. This victory stirred the emulation of the London masons, who presented a useless petition for Saturday's work to end at twelve.

The exact form—" nine hours "—of the new demand was due to the delegates of the feeble and scattered trade clubs of the London carpenters and joiners. These were linked together by a shadowy Central Board, which had revised its rules about this time,* and presented in the summer of 1858 a formal demand for the nine-hours day, which, after a conference, was emphatically refused. Faced with this refusal, they turned to the other building trades, and a permanent Conference was

* " It has been deemed requisite to extend the principles of the Central Board and to bring all societies represented under one code of General Laws in order to maintain the recognised principles of the trade"—General Laws of the Central Board of the Metropolitan, Suburban and Provincial Societies of Carpenters and Joiners, 1860. For other references see O.S.M. *Returns*, under dates mentioned.

called together, consisting at first only of delegates of the various carpenters' societies, the small London Operative Bricklayers' Society, and the London lodges of the Masons.

Its secretary, and the man most responsible for its creation, was George Potter, a very well-known trade unionist of this period. Potter was born in 1832, at Kenilworth. He was the son of a carpenter, and, unlike many trade unionists, had received some elementary education. He was apprenticed regularly to his trade, and worked at it during all this period. Going to London in 1853, he became secretary of a small local carpenters' club, called the "Progressive Society of Carpenters and Joiners," and in that capacity took over the leadership of the nine-hours day movement in 1857, and remained in general direction of the London Building Trades until 1862.*

The first meeting of the Conference was held in September, 1858. It was intended to be a permanent body, to sit steadily at least until the nine-hours had been gained. Originally it contained carpenters, masons and bricklayers only; in October "Two Plasters" were admitted, painters joined over the winter and just prior to the lock-out some builders' labourers' delegates were invited. The masons were more interested in the short Saturday than the nine-hours. They withdrew for a while, but soon returned, and for the most part of the time their chief delegate, R. W. Grey, was chairman of the Conference. The main aim of the Conference was to awaken the building workers themselves to their own interests, and for this reason Potter turned not to strikes or threats of strikes, but first of all to the presentation of memorials to the

* *Beehive*, August 12, 1873. Henceforward refer to 1858 *Minutes*.

employers, hoping by this means to get discussion and the revival of interests. Two or three of these were presented, without, of course, any tangible success. Following on this, regular public meetings were organised over the winter and considerable attention, both within and without the trade, was drawn to the new proposals. The Conference also published *Live and Let Live*, by Evan Daniel, an essay advocating the nine-hours.* In March, 1859, Potter arranged large meetings of building trade workers at all points of London, which were to be held simultaneously, and at each the same resolution would be moved by special delegates.

The results of these meetings, and the general effect of this publicity campaign encouraged Potter to refer the question of further action to the rank and file. The Conference, which every day seemed more to resemble a united Trades Union, balloted its constituents on the further methods to be pursued—viz., more agitation, arbitration, or a strike. For the first voted 1,395, for the second 1,157, for the third only 772. The process of agitation was resumed over the summer, until in June and July a firmer spirit showed itself, both bricklayers and carpenters voting for a strike. The minor trades were still opposed, and so were the masons. Harnott, moreover, away in Bristol, while not actually forbidding the movement, was grumbling and commenting hostilely. Consequently, Potter still played for safety: presented another petition and prepared to wait developments, when a sudden action by the masters precipitated a fight.

* 1858 *Minutes*, February, 1859. There is a pamphlet of that name, date and subject in the British Museum, but the author's name or pseudonym is Whitehead.

The continual agitation by the operatives had put the master builders of London, a body of men traditionally tyrannous and autocratic, into a fretful and irritated temper ; the propaganda by public meetings had made the employing classes at large alarmed and annoyed. "How on earth," asked one of the London journals,* "can a body of uneducated labourers add to the truth on any subject by gathering together into a mob ?" The employers were, in fact, anxious for a struggle, and when in July the last petition was presented to certain London master builders, one of the largest firms, Trollope in Pimlico (now Trollope and Colls), dismissed from their employment the mason who had headed the deputation presenting it. The masons were the only well-organised body of unionists in London, and were in a position to resent this.† The London Lodges, as was probably anticipated, called off all their members from Trollope's job in Knightsbridge. The Conference, naturally, endorsed this, and brought out all the rest of Trollope's employees on July 21, 1859. The Conference further decided that the strike should not be closed until Trollope's had granted the nine hours as well as reinstated the discharged unionist. The masters immediately replied by a general lock-out. Every large builder in London closed his shop within the fortnight, and 24,000 men were put on the streets.

Nor were the shops to be opened to any man who would not sign the "Document," revived for this purpose. The new form of the "Document," drafted by the Central Master Builders Association, had been

* *Illustrated Times*, August 6, 1859. O.B.S., various.

† "The masons are a high-spirited and well-organised body."—*Balance Sheet of* 1860 (A.S.W., various).

prepared and printed in the form of a cheque book, with counterfoils which could be filed. It read as follows :—

" I declare that I AM NOT now, nor will I during the " continuance of my engagement with you, become a " MEMBER OF OR SUPPORT ANY SOCIETY " which directly or indirectly interferes with the arrange- " ments of this or any other Establishment OR the " HOURS OR TERMS OF LABOUR, and that I " recognize the right of Employers and Employed in- " dividually TO MAKE ANY TRADE ENGAGE- " MENTS ON WHICH THEY MAY CHOOSE TO " AGREE."*

The masters were surprised by the reception of this precious piece of paper. They had expected that their yards would be quickly refilled by men who had signed it ; instead, they could hardly secure even any general labourers. " Nine-hour missionaries " were sent out by the Conference into the provinces to stop, as far as possible, the arrival of worked or raw material. The masons, although Harnott had strongly disapproved of the striking of Trollope's job, were naturally supported steadily and regularly now that they were locked out. More than that, the attitude of the governing class of England as a whole had undergone a change, and they were no longer prepared to approve entirely of the " knock-out " policy of the master-builders. These latter were astonished, therefore, to find that on the whole the Press and public opinion were actually against them. The Sunday papers, particularly *Reynolds's* and the *Weekly Mail*, defended the men openly. Of daily papers, the *Morning Advertiser* acted as if it had been Potter's own paper; the *Morning Post* gave both sides fairly. There were, of course, certain journals which

* *Chandler*, p 7.

were more or less directly under the influence of the master-builders, and the *Times*, *Illustrated Times* and *Daily News* were particularly unscrupulous in slandering the employees. From these journals the operatives had their first experience of the campaign of Press misrepresentation which now accompanies every strike, and the methods were similar. Of the bell-wether of the journalist troop Potter wrote—" For its cowardly and dishonest conduct the *Daily Telegraph* has earned for itself a pre-eminent, if not a proud, position. Into the columns of this flash and flimsy newspaper the most virulent attacks on the Secretary of the Conference were admitted, whilst every one of his answers to his masked accusers was not only excluded from its pages, but treated with insulting silence by the cowardly manager of this daily calumniator."* Nevertheless, on the whole, the master builders found themselves without the support they had expected.

They therefore took the step of withdrawing the written Document and substituting a verbal declaration in the same terms. This was a false move. It did them no good, and got them no workers, while it looked like a half-hearted confession of error. It gave Potter an opportunity to claim a moral superiority for the workers. " The implied object," he wrote, " and undoubted tendency of the substitution of the ' declaration ' or *verbal* pledge not to belong to a trades' union, for the ' document ' or written pledge to this effect, was to induce the men to believe that they were less committed by one than by the other—that the violation of a *verbal* agreement is less immoral than the violation of a *written* one—that though a man ought to be ashamed of himself for writing his adhesion to an infamous

* Balance Sheet, 1860, p. 16. A.S.W. various.

stipulation the case was altogether altered when the same base and immoral covenant was completed by *speech* and not by signature."*

The attitude of the operatives was moderate. Potter was conscious that their appearance of strength might easily vanish at any time. It was doubtful whether a third of the strikers, even including the masons, were in unions of any kind, and finances were most insecure. The masons, moreover, showed a dangerous tendency to act alone. In September their Central Committee in Bristol judged the strain on their finances sufficiently serious for Harnott himself to go up to London. On arriving there he practically thrust Potter aside and made the masons act independently of the Conference. He decided—on his own authority and in complete disregard of the constitution—that the nine-hours claim must be abandoned. Acting specifically " for the masons alone " he spent the last half of September in trying to induce the master-builders to withdraw the " declaration " in return for the abandonment of the nine-hours claim. He even offered to discuss the society's " objectionable bye-laws " with them. His offers were considered and rejected at a meeting on the last day of September. One firm alone agreed to them, and there the masons went back to work. Harnott returned to Bristol.

The Conference then resumed the leadership of the movement. Potter, although caricatured later as a " strike-jobber," was a moderate and skilful leader. He saw that Harnott was, in fact, right, and that the best thing was to drop the " nine-hours " and concentrate on fighting the document. The Conference, therefore, on November 9, formally called off the strike at Trollope's

† Balance Sheet, 1860, p.7. A.S.W. various.

and abandoned the nine-hours. The employers, however, were obstinate and held to the document, and the struggle was prolonged over the winter and into the new year.

The Conference was in a grave financial situation. The masons alone punctually supported their members. The other trades were in a very bad position. Most of the locked-out men were not in a union at all, and had to be supported somehow. The painters and carpenters had no national unions at all—the General Union did not touch London—and their funds disappeared almost at once. The Operative Bricklayers' Society (London Order) was small and poor : it had to pay over £3,000 in all to its own members, and could only raise £580 for non-union men. Plumbers' organisations hardly existed, and though a Builders' Labourers' Union was formed, with thirteen London Lodges and nearly 4,000 members, its funds were negligible. All told, one week's payment of the 24,000 on the pay-roll would have eaten up most of the funds of all the unions.

Here it was that Potter's previous agitation was found useful. The publicity he had courted had made every trade unionist regard this fight as one of the greatest importance to unions everywhere—as, indeed, it was. "Trades Committees"—as we should say, Trades Councils—either existing or formed for the purpose, devoted themselves to collecting money in small sums and sending it to Potter. Before long, money began to pour in as never before. From twenties and thirties it rose to hundreds of pounds. Glasgow Committee raised £257, Blackburn £271, and Manchester as much as £545. Numbers of London Societies sent in very heavy sums. The London Society of Compositors put up £620 by itself, and the Pianoforte Makers and Shipwrights

sent £300 each. All these sums were, both in relation to prices and to union funds, vastly greater than the same sums would be to-day. The greatest sensation, however, was caused by the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, which astounded the Conference and the employers by presenting the lock-out funds with a thousand pounds every week for three weeks. Such a subscription had never been heard of before, and its moral effect in encouraging the men and flabbergasting the employers helped very greatly in defeating the attack.

The result was that only one section of the strikers gave way. The labourers, for reasons that are unrecorded, broke away in the beginning of December, and Potter struck them off the pay roll on December 3. Their union was already falling to pieces. Funds were just at that time fairly low, and, as they heralded their breakaway by beating the delegates sent to pay them, it is probable that some question of money was behind it.

It was generally now recognised that the struggle would not end soon, unless the masters gave way. Lord St. Leonards, therefore, intervened with a proposal that the master-builders should substitute for the document a long summary of the law on combinations, to be hung in all workshops—that is to say, that they should admit defeat. Harnott immediately instructed the masons that they were to agree to this, and the Conference did so also. The master-builders, however, living up to their general reputation for unusual obstinacy and autocracy, refused it, and held out for two months more, until on February 7 they unconditionally withdrew the document. On February 27 Potter paid the 27th and last instalment of lock-out pay.

The impression which the struggle had made on the mind of every worker was deep. It was only a

half-victory, but it had shown to the non-unionists how a very powerful, wealthy and obstinate association of employers could be defied. It had also shown to the unionists how ineffective their own organisations were. They had, in fact, been nearly helpless in the earlier stages of the movement. The direction of the movement fell into the hands of the delegates of mass meetings, and the majority of those attending were non-unionists. Their own resources (and their votes showed they knew it) were not sufficient to support a strike for the nine-hours. When they were finally locked-out they were only saved from disaster because they were able to bring into the fight the whole trade union resources of England and Scotland. Thus we find, as a result of the lock-out, both a great influx of members into existing unions, and a movement towards the reconstruction of existing societies upon a new basis. This is true not only of London, but of Great Britain as a whole. The economic conditions favourable to a growth of trade unionism were the same over all England and Scotland, and the wide advertisement of the recent struggle made it well known enough to act everywhere as a timely stimulus. Plasterers, Painters, Carpenters and Joiners and Plumbers formed new organisations altogether. The existing organisation of Bricklayers was reconstituted. The half-alive societies of bricklayers, painters and carpenters in the provinces woke up and increased their activities and membership. A weekly paper, devoted not to one trade or the other but to all labour, was started in London by George Potter in 1861, and under the title first of the *Beehive* and then the *Industrial Review*, ran for seventeen years.

Immediately as a result of the strike, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners was founded

(in 1860), taking Robert Applegarth as its secretary in 1862. Immediately after the strike Henry Turff, the secretary of the Operative Bricklayers' Society (London Order) lost his position to Edwin Coulson, under whose direction the society was reorganised and grew into a large national organisation. The date of the formation of the National Association of Operative Plasterers is uncertain, but appears to be the same—1860—and in any case its reorganisation by Charles Owen Williams in 1861 was a direct result of the experiences of the lock-out. The London painters also formed an " Amalgamated Association of Operative Painters " in 1860, with R. Shaw as secretary.

These societies, in intention at any rate, were modelled upon the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, which had so distinguished itself in the lock-out. All except one of them (Plasterers') were centred in London and were under the influence of the group which has been called the Junta. Other societies in the provinces, which were formed or revived about this time, did not follow the same principles. The recovery of the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners dates from the appointment of Robert Last as general secretary in 1862. The Manchester Order of Operative Bricklayers had lost its able secretary Lockett, and the increase in members that it recorded cannot justly be ascribed to any activities of the new secretary, M. J. O'Neil. The Plumbers of Scotland and the North of England did not come together until 1866, and then on an old-fashioned basis. The Manchester Alliance of Operative House Painters had existed from 1856, but first became powerful at this date. All these societies were formed or run upon the old-fashioned lines and had no connection with or toleration of the " amalgamated principles " advocated

by the new unionists. In this attitude they had the strong support of George Potter and his new paper, and relied also considerably upon the prestige of Richard Harnott and the support of the large, powerful, confident and, indeed, arrogant Society of Operative Stonemasons. But before we go into the history of the struggle which filled the next twenty years and ended in the total alteration of the outlook, machinery and ideas of the British Trade Union movement, we must describe more exactly what these " amalgamated principles " were.

CHAPTER IX

THE SERVILE GENERATION

ROBERT APPLEGARTH * HIGH BENEFITS, HIGH SUBSCRIPTIONS, INDUSTRIAL PEACE * STRIKES DISCOURAGED * ARBITRATION * PERSONAL REFORM * THE OLDER UNIONIST * EMPLOYERS' PROPAGANDA * USE OF EDUCATION * LIBERAL ALLIES OF THE JUNTA * CAUSES OF THE CHANGE

1860–1862

A COMPLETE change of policy, ideas and personnel came over the whole of the British trade union movement after the great lock-out of 1860. Of the agents of this change the most famous and important belonged to the building industry—Robert Applegarth, Edwin Coulson, George Howell, Henry Broadhurst—as did also their chief antagonist, George Potter, and his supporters, Harnott and Last. Applegarth and his colleagues consciously and carefully reconstructed the trade union movement. They formed, in the earlier period, a regular group, which has been afterwards called "the Junta,"* though at the time it was known as "the Clique," or even "the Dirty Pack," and worked

* By the Webbs. But the term is their own invention. It was an undefined body, like every clique, but we can say that William Allan (A.S.E.), Robert Applegarth (A.S.C.J.), Edwin Coulson (O.B.S.), George Odger (belonged to a small shoemakers' club—useful mainly for agitation and politics), Daniel Guile (Ironfounders) formed the inner ring. There were others, of course, in more or less close agreement and contact, among whom were John Kane (Amalgamated Ironworkers' Association), George Howell (Manchester Unity and London Trades Council), William Dronfield (Sheffield Amal. Trades), Alexander MacDonald (Miners' National Union).

consciously to their own ends, now through the "Conference of Amalgamated Trades," now through the London Trades Council, now through the Trades Union Congress. The revolt that they led was a revolt of young men. Whenever (for example) an Owenite scheme for co-operative production is turned down, it is the young men who are responsible. They intended to remodel the movement in accordance with their own ideas. It was the strangest revolt of youth that has ever been seen; for it was a revolt in favour of caution, of care and method, of self-restraint and laborious attention to detail. The new generation was a servile generation.

No insult is meant by that term. The previous generation—the trade unionists of 1833 and the Chartists—had been lamentably inadequate to their task, but they had revolted against the fact of their status: they did not accept the suffering and degradation which had been forced upon them, and they tried to recover their freedom by revolution—by remodelling the whole fabric of society. The new generation accepted its status as a lower class. If it was their fate to live as workers, selling their labour, they would make the best of it, and get the best price they could. The young men of twenty and thirty, who had led in the Operative Builders' Union, were now old men of fifty and sixty, whose period of usefulness was ending. The new generation had no recollection of better times to spur them on, all they remembered was the continual instances of incompetence and failure in the later Chartist period, and the aspirations to a freer society were indissolubly linked in their minds with noise, fraud and failure. They recollected "the apparent determination to carry out principles in opposition to every obstacle—the noisy approbation of

the meeting—the loud cries of 'hear, hear,' 'bravo,' 'hurrah,' 'union for ever,' etc.," but also remembered that time proved that these " proceedings were indicative of an over-excited state of mind which would speedily evaporate and leave them in the same condition as before."*

Applegarth was the man who most of all incarnated this new spirit. For some years previously William Allan, of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, had been carrying on a practical experiment in the new principles. The A.S.E. was based, roughly, upon high contributions, high benefits, few strikes, and the protection of the craft against the unskilled. But it was left to Applegarth to carry these principles to their logical conclusion, to apply them, to Allan's surprise, to politics and to the personal character of his members. He made of " amalgamated principles " not merely a reformation of trade union machinery, but almost a system of philosophy.

Robert Applegarth (born January, 1834, still living in 1923) was a Sheffield man, not apprenticed to the trade. He was the son of a quartermaster, and had emigrated early to America† and returned in 1858, when he joined the Sheffield branch of the General Union.‡ The methods of this body annoyed him so much that he took the whole branch into the new society, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners. This had been formed on June 4, 1860, after laborious negotiations between members of various London Trade Clubs. Only some of these joined in the final amalgamation, which started with no more than 618 members. From the very

* *The Trades Advocate*, 1841, in Webb, p. 153.

† Humphrey, ch. i.

‡ *Beehive*, December 3, 1868.

beginning it aimed not merely at high benefits and subscriptions, but at an imitation of Allan's office efficiency. The secretary was not merely to be paid 33s. a week, but he was to have assistance at 7s. 6d. The first secretary was J. Lea, who was not trusted by the members. Applegarth beat him at the 1862 election, but he attempted to retain office by forging the figures. He was discovered, ousted, and prosecuted, and Applegarth took his place as General Secretary.

In the next ten years Applegarth did all his active work in the trade union movement. We are apt to get a wrong impression of his methods from a sight of Robert Applegarth to-day. Now a very old man, he has the gentleness of old age, and his mild, white-bearded face suggests a kindly yielding nature. Applegarth gained none of his successes by Christian mildness and patience: he had much more of the devil than the angel in him. When younger, he was a restless, dark-faced man, autocratic and brooked no opposition, within or without the union. He could work well and harmoniously with men who, like Coulson, were in close agreement with him. But if a man or an executive defied him, he broke them. He used fair means if he could, foul if he needed. No suspicion of personal motive ever seriously touched him, and for that reason he felt the more justified in using the most questionable methods. The Junta, in fighting George Potter, used crooked methods and slander; and the main inspiration of the Junta was Applegarth.

His reconstruction of trade unionism began with finance. High contributions and high benefits were his rule. High contributions limited the membership to the steady craftsmen whom he wished to attract. Once in the union they would not easily sacrifice the money

they had paid in by dropping out of the union, as happened with all the old unions. High benefits required careful accountancy and great caution in industrial policy. The members would fight shy of a strike when it endangered the money they were relying on for their own "superannuation." "A trade society without friendly benefits is like a standing army: it is a constant menace to peace," said one of the same school later.* For Applegarth's main object was to avoid strikes, and all that strikes implied. He desired (and in this desire was simply expressing that of the rank and file as a whole) to replace the previous conflict of employers and employed by a harmonious co-operation, towards which both sides needed to be educated. The employers could be persuaded that Trade Unions meant them no harm, but on the contrary picked out for them the best workers†: the workers must be induced to abandon the weapon of the strike, wherever possible, in favour of reason. Applegarth did not wish to deny that a strike could ever be necessary; any more than he would have denied that it might be necessary to use violence in self-defence; but he seriously thought that a strike should become as rare as the use of a revolver in a civilised community. He was asked by the Royal Commission in 1867, "Is the Executive in the habit of suggesting or counselling a strike?—It never does so."‡ In 1865, after the dispute in Birmingham, he induced his Executive to pass a resolution that "under no circumstances will any branch be allowed to strike without first obtaining the sanction of this Council, whether it be for a new privilege or against an encroachment on existing ones." The Rules

* John Burnett, in Webb I.D. 160.

† Cf. Humphrey, p. 38.

‡ 1867 Committee, Q. 135.

went farther, and in order to prevent conflicts arising ordered a fine to be inflicted on "any member boasting of his independence towards his employer or employers, on account of being a member of this Society."*

Should it be impossible to prevent the local branch from demanding authorisation to strike, difficulties could be put in its way still at headquarters. A form of application, in itself an unheard of thing, was carefully thought out in order to place the greatest possible number of obstacles to strikes at all. It read as under :—

"FORM OF APPLICATION

"An application having been made to the Executive "Council by the Members of the Society in . . . . . "for the support of the Society in endeavouring to im- "prove their social position, you are required to fill up "this Schedule and return it to General Office ; and if "there be any special circumstances connected with the "case the same must be stated on the fourth page, under "the head of General Statement.

"By order,

. . . . . *General Secretary.*

"SCHEDULE

"1. Date of meeting at which application was made.

"2. Does the application emanate from a meeting of "the whole of the members in the district ?

"3. How many members have we in the district ?

"4. How many were present at the meeting when the "application was made ?

* Higgenbotham.

" 5. State the number of hours worked per week at " the present and the present rate of weekly wages.

" 6. State the number of working hours per week and " the rate of weekly wages under the proposed new " arrangement.

" 7. If any other privileges are asked for, state them.

" 8. Is a recognised code of working rules already in " operation ? If so, forward a copy.

" 9. When do you propose to give notice to your em- " ployers ?

" 10. When does the said notice terminate ?

" 11. What number of votes were recorded in favour " of the proposed alterations at the meeting from which " this request emanated ?

" 12. Were any amendments proposed ? If so, state " the character of the amendments and the number of " votes recorded for each.

" 13. Are there any other societies in the district ? " If so, state their names and number of members.

" 14. Have the members of other societies applied for " or obtained the support of their respective societies ?

" 15. What number of non-society men have you in " the district ?

" 16. Were the proposed alterations adopted at a " general meeting of the trade ? If so, state the number " of carpenters and joiners present and the number of " votes recorded in favour of the alterations.

" 17. What provision is made for the support of non- " society men in the event of a dispute ?

" 18. When did you gain your last advance of wages " and reduction of hours ?

" 19. State the advantages gained at that time.

" 20. Did a strike or lock-out occur at that time ? If " so, how long did it last ?

" 21. What is the state of trade at present, and what " reasons have you for anticipating that at the time when " the notice expires the state of trade will be such as to " induce your employers to concede the advance asked " for ?

" GENERAL STATEMENT

(Here insert any special circumstances connected with the case.)

" FORM OF RESOLUTION

" To be adopted by the Senior Branch of the District.

" Name of Branch.....No. of Do.....

" Meeting Night....., 18....

" Proposed by Brother....., Seconded by " Brother....., and Resolved: That having " heard the statement read as recorded in this Schedule, " it is hereby adopted as a correct statement of the present " position of..... District, and our Branch " Secretary is hereby instructed to forward it to the " General Office for the consideration of the Executive " Council.

" *Signed* { , *President.*
, *Secretary.*

The intention and effect of this was unmistakable. It would chill any enthusiasm and make it perfectly clear

that the Executive would only agree if absolutely forced by circumstances. It was most probable that an old-fashioned branch secretary would fail to fill it up correctly, and thus automatically lose the permission required. It could, indeed, only be filled up by a man of the careful, cautious type that Applegarth wished to encourage. He used no duplicity or concealment in this : he openly propagated his views. One typical instance must suffice—his speech at Chester on August 11, 1866, as reported in the *Cheshire Observer*. After detailing the benefits provided by the union (upon which he always laid the greatest stress), he continued :—

" With regard to strikes he would tell them at once " that he did not approve of that way of doing business, " except in cases of absolute necessity and when every " other means had been tried and failed to accomplish " the desired object. If they had any grievances they " should write to their employers, and if they refused " to agree to their terms, or took no notice of their " appeals, the best thing was not to strike but to lay " their claims before the public ; and the masters would " then be compelled to state their objections, on which " the public would pass their opinion, which they might " consider as the verdict of a jury. If the public agreed " with the employers it was of no use for the Society to " press their case any further, and if public opinion was " with the men it would be no use for the masters to try " to hold out any longer, for it was not out of the em- " ployers' pockets that the advance of wages or the " reduction of hours would come : as in all such cases it " was the public and not the masters who had to ' pay " the piper.' (Applause.) The speaker continued to set " forth the advantages of the Society and to show that if " the employers would only give it a fair consideration

" they would have no fault to find with it, and con-
" cluded by inviting those present, who had not already
" done so, to join the Society."*

Believing in the power of public opinion, the fundamental unity of classes and the indefinite continuance of the capitalist system, he and his group removed every trace of the old unionism that seemed to reflect a class-war basis. The old-fashioned initiations, the power of the Lodges over their own funds, the rules ordering sympathetic strikes, disappeared. The localism of the old form of E.C. was checked by the invention of the General Council (or " House of Lords ") superior to the E.C., meeting at long intervals and representing all areas, a device which became almost universal in the building trades. Certain of the old working rules—such as opposition to piecework and truck—he retained ;

* The comments of the anti-Labour paper that reported him are worth noticing, as a sign of the progress which his ideas were making also upon the other side. It said :—

"Those of our readers who have entertained such an intense horror of "trades unions we commend to the account of the Amalgamated Society of "Carpenters and Joiners in another part of this paper, when they will find "nothing that is calculated to excite their horror or indignation, but quite "the reverse. The Society has done infinite service as a benefit institution, "and if the Secretary's account be correct, at Sheffield it acts as a machine "for preventing disputes between masters and men, rather than causing "them. The Secretary's remarks are deserving of commendation to all "working men."

Compare also questions 102—105 at Applegarth's examination by the 1867 Commission.

The greater importance of "benefits" was also stressed even in the Emblem of the Society on which, it was officially stated, "in the Upper Panels is shown on the left a representation of a Workman having met with an Accident, borne away by his comrades ; and the companion subject on the right, shows the Workman disabled by the loss of limb, receiving the Hundred Pounds Benefit at the hands of the Treasurer of the Branch. The Lower Panels respectively show as companion subjects, the Superannuation Benefit and the Relief of the Widow."—Higgenbotham.

others, such as apprenticeship rules, were judged illiberal and vexatious to the employer, and were dropped. The sentiment of solidarity between worker and worker became very faint, and the craft spirit became very strong. The A.S.C.J. became a wealthy and powerful union directed autocratically from the centre and run exclusively in the interests of carpenters and joiners.

To replace strikes, Applegarth had two remedies. The first—a minor one—was emigration. Accepting the theories of his Liberal friends, he agreed that Labour was like any other commodity, and the only way of raising its price was to lessen the supply as compared with the demand. Hence an Emigration Bonus was founded ; but as no one wished to emigrate except in the bad years when the Union was too poor to pay it, it was never used, and the benefit was abolished later—" no member ever having received it " in the twenty years in which it nominally existed.* Out of work pay, of course, was given, and fares to likely places as a substitute for tramp-money, but Applegarth's main cure was Arbitration.

Conciliation—that is to say, discussion of demands between employers and men—he naturally approved of, but arbitration goes a step further. It means the reference of all disputes to an arbitrator or umpire, whose decision will be accepted by both sides, without question. " Unconditional arbitration " was Applegarth's panacea, and in one case he tried to prevent aid being sent to strikers who had refused to submit their whole dispute unconditionally to the decision of two Tory peers chosen by the employers. Naturally, such arbitration, as it is to-day, was generally advantageous to the employers. Applegarth recognised this, but believed

* Chandler, p. 27.

that their increase in status and the growth of public respect for them would amply compensate in the end for the half-pence an hour the Trade Unionists might lose.

He drew his fellow trade-unionists into politics to support these aims. A great admirer and follower (as one might guess) of Gladstone, he flung the weight of the Trade Union movement into the support of the Liberal Party. Almost his first public action was the founding of the "Trade Union Political Union" for universal suffrage and the ballot.* The formation and use of the London Trades Council by the Junta for political agitation was copied all over the country, and slowly Trades Councils arose all over the Kingdom in every large provincial town. They were nearly always firm supporters of Applegarth's policy, and acted as recruiting grounds for the Liberal party. After the granting of the franchise to the workers in towns in 1867, Applegarth scored a number of political victories which we shall consider later, including the return of Mundella for Sheffield, in 1868, and the passing of Arbitration Acts in 1867 and 1872.

Such a new movement could not but be based on new men. The old type of trade unionist was not fitted even to understand it, and Applegarth and his "Clique" had to be moral as well as social reformers. Temperance, self-education, chastity, self-restraint and hard work were pressed upon their followers, and were, indeed, their own most distinguishing marks. In this, as in the rest of his programme, Applegarth was only expressing the feelings of his fellow working men. Before he had even taken up his post, in the first rules of the Society, the Executive had warned its constituents that only personal reform could pave the way to social reform :—

* In November, 1862. *Beehive.*

ROBERT APPLEGARTH

Taken from the "Beehive," June 1873.

"We shall be faithless to our fellow working men," they said, " if we omit to record our honest conviction that this much to be desired condition must be preceded by the equally universal spread of the principles of economy and sobriety, which would be accelerated by our meeting for business in public halls or private rooms, where, by the establishment of libraries and listening to the voice of the lecturer on all subjects connected with our interests, we and our sons should become respectful and respected, and make rapid progress in the onward march of reform."*

The A.S.C.J., under his influence, started technical education of its members in 1868, to improve their skill as craftsmen, and the next year issued a trade directory, to assist them to improve their position.† Temperance was generally recognised as a sign of the new unionism. " On the 20th of September, 1860, I left off buying beer and took to buying books to improve my mind," wrote Patrick Kenney, who afterwards tried to extend amalgamated principles to builders' labourers.‡ When an attempt was contemplated in 1872 to get a number of Liberal working-men into Parliament, the *Beehive*, then completely under Applegarth's influence, stated that the duty of the new M.P.s would be, not (as we might expect) to secure the repeal of laws oppressing the workers, but " to diminish the growing passion for mere sensual indulgence."

These were the principles advocated by Applegarth. Temperance, chastity and meticulousness seem, perhaps, a little uninspiring ; to the old generation of trade unionists they seemed intolerably and irrelevantly

* Rules of the A.S.C. and J., 1860.

† It was a failure and was sold only to the few vagrant members. *Chandler*, p. 33.

‡ Kenney.

priggish. We may sympathise with them, but we cannot deny, in view of the past history of the movement, that there was need for Applegarth's sermons—unless we are prepared to argue that to be a good member of the Labour movement a man should be drunken, lewd and untidy.

When the struggle between Potter and Applegarth, and all that they stood for, first began, the appearances of strength were on Potter's side. He had a paper, the *Beehive*, which was influential and widely read. The unions run upon the old principles outnumbered the new unions in prestige, numbers and membership. Mr. Gladstone himself bitterly chagrined Applegarth by asking, "Is it not Mr. Potter who is the far-famed secretary of the Trade Unions?"* Inside the "Clique" there was only one man, Allan, who had the backing of a large, powerful and genuinely respected union. But the A.S.E. was still something of an oddity among unions: it had not the age and appearance of great stability that the Stonemasons' had. Allan was, at the beginning of this period, of less weight than Harnott. Particularly in the building trades did the dice seem to be weighted against them. The Manchester Unity, or Order, of Bricklayers was notably larger than the London Order run by Coulson. The General Union retained for some years a larger membership than the A.S.C.J. The Manchester Alliance of Painters actually came down to London and "poached." Nevertheless, easily and in a short time, the Junta gained control of the trade union movement, and the old unions fell into obscurity and defeat.

The old unionism was defeated because it had no logical basis and was no longer useful under existing

* Humphrey 54

economic conditions. The first quarrel between Potter and Applegarth came over a question of solidarity with the Staffordshire strikers. Potter enlists our sympathy by his generous efforts to bring aid against Applegarth's wishes, and it is easy to be misled and see in Potter and his followers class-conscious workers of the modern type : fighting a class war and knowing it, and prepared for industry to aid industry in despite of craft. They were nothing of the sort. There was, indeed, a strong but vague sentiment of solidarity in their ranks: the masons were still pledged to assist other trades on strike. But it was no more than a sentiment : the spirit of Chartism and the Trade Unions of 1833 had faded away, leaving only a vague instinct of solidarity and an unreasoning preference for old-fashioned methods. They preferred the strike as a method, not because they wished to injure an oppressing class, but because they always had used the strike and were not inclined or prepared for the amount of thought that its rejection demanded. So far as Potter had a political philosophy, it was the same as Applegarth's. "In political sympathies," he wrote of himself, "Mr. Potter is an ardent Liberal."* He could not, nor could his followers, argue against Applegarth's principles and their application, because they believed in them and their opposition was hardly rational at all.† They were reduced to the most foolish personal arguments.

In fact, though he denied it, Potter was standing for small trade clubs and federal organisation on a strictly trade basis, as opposed to centralised, wealthy, powerful unions, and for strikes as a principle instead of conciliation. Such a programme has only to be stated to show its

* A.S.W. various.

† He approved of arbitration in theory. 1867 Committee, Q. 378.

weakness. It received support only from habit. No clear-minded revolutionaries supported Potter: only the old worthies of trade unionism who carried on their lodge business mainly in the bar. Pub-crawling was contemptuously said to be the basis of Potter's strength: it was true. The old stagers liked loose federal unions, trade clubs and simple finance, because all the business they involved could in fact be carried on in the saloon bar of a public-house. The tradition of "Mick" O'Neil, then the Manchester Order's secretary, is that he always much resented even the rough auditing by two members which the Order required. The auditing had to be done in a public-house: if he was in a good temper he would fill the auditors with beer, if not, he would form a group to insult and harass them, in either case preventing any serious work. In this O'Neil was only acting as any other supporter of the old system would have acted. Between such antagonists and the Junta, the issue was not seriously in doubt. Not all the organising ability of Harnott or the journalism of Potter could save a system so hopelessly out of date.

What were the reasons for the emergence of this new movement just at this date?

In the first place it was a reaction against organisation by the employers. The clamour for the nine hours, which had been going on since 1853 in a desultory manner, had irritated the master builders into forming permanent organisations. Previously they had come together for short periods to present the Document, or in other ways to harass their workers on a given matter, and had scattered after the particular conflict was over. They had formed also associations of master plasterers, master plumbers and so on, which could be played off by the workers against the general builder, and against each

other. But many years had passed since 1833 when the small master could injure the general builder. Master bricklayers and master masons were little known, master carpenters had utterly vanished in London, and, although master plasterers, master painters and master plumbers resisted longer, all the big business was now in the hands of large general contractors. These formed permanent Master Builders' Associations, with a journal and regular subscriptions. We have already mentioned the Central Master Builders' Association in 1859, which was confined to London. A more ambitious start was made by the northern builders in November, 1857, when they formed the "National Master Builders' Association," whose immediate aim was to break up the working day by enforcing payment by the hour. A hundred and eighty-nine firms, operating mainly in the belt of industrial England running from Liverpool in the west to the West Riding in the east,* made up this body, which seems to have dwindled away after its defeat by the Stonemasons. It was reorganised on a permanent basis on March 7, 1866, as the General Builders' Association, covering mainly the north of England. Henceforward the organisation of the employers, from being inferior became much superior to that of the operatives, and new and more scientific machinery was needed to fight them.

A second and more important cause was one which operated more obviously in the general trade union world than in the building industry. The master builders were not altogether representative of the employing classes as a whole. These, mostly Liberal, employers, were inclined to abandon the weapon of direct

* The towns represented were Liverpool, Manchester, Blackburn, Bolton, Huddersfield, Nottingham, Newcastle, Birmingham. O.S.M. *Returns*, December, 1857.

force against the unions to which the master builders were still attached. For a long time past the employers had, consciously or unconsciously, been moving towards the policy of disarming and taming rather than fighting their employees, and to this end they had employed, from the best motives, small reforms and great educational propaganda. That is not to say that they abandoned their opposition to trade unionism. If they could conveniently, as in the case of the judge-made law of which we shall speak later, they were only too glad to hamper and harass the unions. But they had abandoned, as a class, the idea of stamping them out and spent their time in inculcating distrust of them if they could; if they could not, distrust of any militant policy.

In the earlier days we do not find any such sustained and regular efforts to the propagation of Liberal ideas in the working class. Here and there of course men and women devoted themselves to preaching resignation and self-improvement to the workers. But up to the year 1832 the bourgeoisie as a whole rather encouraged the working class to turbulence and in that year actually used its revolutionary feeling for its own ends. Indeed, not until the final victory of the Corn Law Repeal in 1846 did the Liberal employers utterly abjure the use of force and attempt to impress the same principles upon the people as a whole.

Roughly speaking, we may say that from 1833 onwards the working class was subjected, like an allotment, to the intensive cultivation of Liberal and pacifist ideas, and the effect of these thirty years of education is clearly shown in the character of the new unionists and of Applegarth himself. A very considerable amount of the work was done by one publishing firm, Charles Knight, originally agent for Brougham's Society for

the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. His period of activity dates from 1833 to 1869. He was author as well as publisher. He wrote, for example, the books entitled *The Results of Machinery*, *Capital and Labour*, *The Character and Effects of Trades Unions*, especially addressed to working men and spread broadcast at a low price. Besides these, which of course explained and supported the orthodox political economy, he issued at the same time, in cheap monthly or weekly parts, to ensure their being read by the workers, a Shakespeare, a Pictorial History of England, a Pictorial Bible, a Penny Cyclopedia, and many other such works. In a manner which has been followed ever since, valuable information, actual technical education, and a broadening study of the humanities was combined with history and political economy which were really veiled propaganda. The history taught that all progress had led up to and culminated in the truly free Society of Liberal capitalism, where there were no restrictions and all men were legally equal. The political economy taught that free competition was the highest possible stage of development and supply and demand the only inexorable law. Temperance, hard work and self-improvement with a view to rising from the ranks were recommended as the sole means of advancement to the working class. Trade unions were dismissed briefly as nearly useless, with a word of praise, if at all, for their friendly benefits.

Similar views were propagated by the Working Men's Club and Institute movement. This, at its foundation in 1859, intended to provide houses of call which would supplant the unions altogether, but it quickly corrected its methods. The Institutes provided rooms for the more respectable unions to meet in, in some cases sold a strictly temperate amount of drink, and

always arranged lectures, reading rooms and small libraries containing Knight's and similar publications. Their programme of temperance, hard work and self-improvement fitted in so exactly with the programme of the Junta that we find before long Applegarth, Howell, and Cremer among their official supporters.* Their organ, the *Working Man*, gave technical information and instruction in many sciences, as well as in moral improvement. It urged upon all workers to try to rise from the ranks, and told them that Trade Unionism, although a natural reaction to the folly of employers, was " crude and impotent."

This educational war of the employers, which has by no means ended, had a deep effect upon the minds of the Victorian workers. We, most of us, can remember trade unionists of the older school, formed by this propaganda, to whom anything not in accordance with Victorian Liberalism was genuinely unintelligible. Such a moral victory was won mainly by educational work, but general propaganda also bore its part. Pamphlets and booklets abounded urging the workers, more or less crudely, to abandon their unionism or at any rate to limit its activity, in favour of hard work for their own personal advantage. The portrait of the ideal building worker was bluntly put before the operatives by a writer calling himself " Nathaniel " in a *Letter to the Operatives of the Building Trade* † :—

" Perhaps, without being chargeable with either " egotism or vanity, I may mention that the writer of " these lines while living in London 33 years ago, did " as you do now, or ought to do—*work*. It was good " for him, as it was for you. He believes he worked

* *Beehive*, August 27, 1870.

† Potter, p. 12.

" more hours every day than you, at any rate more than " is agreeable. He recollects, after labouring hard one " day from early morn to dewy eve, returning to his " lodgings in Tottenham Court Road ; previous to " taking his supper, he sat upon the bed and being some- " what fatigued he fell asleep. He was awoke the fol- " lowing morning by an old Jarvey calling ' half-past " four.' He rose up, washed himself (he was already " dressed), went to his work as usual at five o'clock, to " one of the clubhouses in St. James's Street, and " so on day after day, month after month. He never " succumbed or cried ' peccavi.' He laboured hard and " long, rising early and late taking rest, and still found " time to read, write and study—resolved to get on. And " so may you ; every man deserving of the name can do " as he has done and better still."

Other publications approached the matter more delicately. The *Case of Potterabout versus Wollop*, a pamphlet circulated widely during the lock-out, attempted to prove, in the form of a satirical account of an imaginary law-case, that employers in the nature of things were necessary, and could not be dispensed with. In the examination of "Timothy Potterabout"* (the Union member, of course !) the counsel for the employer asks :—

" Q.—Then your hopes and wishes are that your " masters should be ruined through you ?

" A.—Of course.

" Q.—But if the masters are ruined, how can you " expect to be employed ? Do you think a new race " of masters will arise immediately ?

" A.—I don't know. I never thought of that.

" Q.—Can you carry on these large works yourself ?

" A.—Lord, bless you, no ! "

* Wollop, p. 10.

The intention of the pamphlet was obscured, or at least its message made more palatable, by the introduction of a non-union, self-improving worker, who had been locked out with the rest, and mild blame was even expressed of the employers for not assisting in preserving industrial peace. But in the same cross examination the author returned to the under-mining of the bellicose spirit of the unionists: the attack on their financial stability was clumsy but more than a little dangerous :—

" Q.—Did you ever read that line which says—

" ' The mind's the standard of the man ' ?

" A.—I never understood it properly until now, sir ; " and I suppose that is the reason why some are work- " men and some are masters.

" Q.—You have just hit it ; and what you must do is to " cultivate your mind, and then, by diligence, honesty " and industry, you may also become a master. Does " your ' Union ' assist you in the strike ?

" A.—No, sir, not yet. We have had a number of sub- " scriptions and I had saved a little money ; but I sup- " pose they will give me some money when I go for it.

" Q.—Don't rely upon them, or perhaps you may find " yourself awkwardly situated. . . .

" A.—I shall attend to what you say and I shall now go " to the ' Union ' and ask them for the promised assist- " ance. . . . If they do not give it I shall believe what you " say and go to work on Monday."

" Union tyranny," the exaltation of loyalty to the employer as a superior, false " confessions by ex-strikers," were brought out :—

" The Committee consisted of twelve men, who re- " ceived extra pay and were often intoxicated. The " tyrannical conduct of the leaders in that strike was such

" as it is impossible for me to convey to your readers.
" Although many of us were on strike most reluctantly,
" I believe it would have been unsafe for us to have
" given utterance to our thoughts ; we were positively
" afraid to speak in the presence of the committee-men.
" . . . I was sent to picquet a shop ; that is, play the part
" of a spy or policeman on the movements of a certain
" master. He was of stern and inflexible character, the
" flash of his eyes used to sink into my very soul."*

This appeared in a Manchester paper in 1867, as the experiences of a striker in the joiners' dispute there. Perhaps we should also class as of the same character the organisation of the Free Labour League by a Colonel Maude, for the supply of blacklegs. It also published literature, of which the title of one book will suffice : " Trades Unions : An Enquiry . . showing the Beauty and Excellence of the Divine Laws governing Workmen and Employers. By Robert Jobson." It was, however, little supported by the employers and broke up : such blunt and crude methods were being abandoned.

The quiescence and respectability induced in the British working man by these means astonished and in some cases almost appalled Liberal manufacturers themselves. Richard Cobden† himself, before the Junta entered Liberal politics, complained that the working men were " so quiet under the taunts and insults offered them. Have they no Spartacus among them to head a revolt of the slave class against their political tormentors ? I suppose it is the reaction from the follies of Chartism that keeps the present generation so quiet."

These influences were reinforced by the genuine allies of the Trade Unions. The group, mainly of Positivists,

* "Ex-Turnout" quoted in MacDonald, p. 4.

† Beer II. 200.

who greatly assisted and supported Applegarth by their position, influence and advice, were strong Liberals.* Enormous aid was given to the new amalgamated unions, in and out of Parliament, by such men as Professor E. S. Beesly, Frederick Harrison, Henry Crompton, Tom Hughes, M.P., W. Russell Gurney and others. In the serious legal and Parliamentary fights in which the unions became involved this group of professional men aided them almost as greatly as Place and Hume had aided forty years before. Real and justified gratitude gave them weight and authority in the unions which far outweighed that of Kingsley and the other "Christian Socialists" who advocated co-operative workshops. (Indeed, so far as the building trade unions are concerned, the latter might never have existed.) Their influence was used steadily and regularly on behalf of Liberalism. Professor Beesly, perhaps the ablest of them, wrote to the Operative Bricklayers' Society :—

"Holding, as I do, that the relation between employer "and labourer is inevitably permanent and that it is the "only sound condition of industrial society, I look to "Trade Societies as the chief means for placing it on "a more healthy footing. Co-operation can never "supersede the present system. . . . Such language as "Mr. Kingsley's is simply disgraceful. There is much "to mend, no doubt, among manufacturers, but they "are an infinitely better and nobler class than squires and "rectors. The time, I hope, is gone by when working "men will listen to sentimental milk-and-water soci-"alism, preached by men in white ties who hate the "manufacturer much more than they care for the work-"men."†

* Cf. Webb, ch. iv, v.

† Letter from E. S. Beesly in O.B.S. Monthly, December, 1862.

The tremendous success of these opinions, of the new education and the new unions, was in the ultimate resort assured and caused by certain economic conditions which have now almost entirely passed away. These conditions were confined to a particular section of the working class. It is obvious that the new proposals could only apply to the skilled workers, not to the larger body of unskilled. High benefits and high subscriptions by themselves presuppose at least the probability of decent wages and stable employment. The drifting, underpaid general labourer could not bear the strain of belonging to an amalgamated union, and we find that amalgamated principles fail when applied to unskilled labour. They were confined to craftsmen.*

At one of the conferences of the International, the question was asked whether the institution of unions and co-operatives was not creating a "fifth estate" below the fourth, and yet more miserable.† This question, so odd to us, then pointed to a very real danger. The amalgamated unions were actually forming a better-paid aristocracy of labour, above the general labourers and in the end opposed to them. The bitterness of the war of craft on craft and of all against the labourer dates from the sixties. The skilled workers had formed for themselves an island of temporary and relative comfort. The words of Marx, "You have nothing to lose but your chains," for this period and for this section of workers, became untrue. They had something to lose, and they became conservative accordingly.

* This is true of practically all unions. Out of a population of thirty to forty millions, William MacDonald reckoned that "there were never at any time more than a quarter of a million members in all the associations of the United Kingdom." (MacDonald, 18.)

† *International*, p. 38.

Their niche of security was gained with the tacit consent of the employers. The times were such that it was bad policy for the capitalist class to fight its workers. The Victorian age was the age of great wealth. "The total amount of exports and imports of the United Kingdom was in 1831 £97,623,332 and in 1860 £373,491,000, being an increase of 283% while the increase in population in that period has been only 43%." *

This enormous increase in prosperity, which made England the workshop of the world, and the richest country on earth, was to continue for many years yet, and during that period of growth the employing class generally was not prepared to fight its skilled workers. Every dispute meant a loss of good money, and, viewing the period as a whole, we see a growing inclination to temporize and to grant real concessions rather than risk, in a profitable period, an upheaval like that of 1833. A docile and hardworking unionist movement was well worth a penny an hour: and the condition of the skilled workers was permitted to improve.

This period continued until external events broke up the conditions that gave it birth. In the first place the emergence of the unskilled, who were unaffected by the amalgamated movement, took the leadership of the Trade Union movement as a whole out of the hands of Applegarth's followers. This began in 1889 with the dock strike, and was completed—in so far as it was ever a complete victory—by 1895 at the Trades Union Congress. Secondly, foreign politics marked the end of the Golden Age of Victorian capitalism about the same time. The age of Manchesterism gave way to the age of imperialism. From 1880 onwards there was the rush for

* Potter 4.

colonies, the dividing up of Africa which marked the end of British absolute supremacy. Henceforward the British capitalist was a struggler among many rivals, and was no longer so rich and easy a victor that he could afford to be generous of the crumbs from his table. " Foreign competition " and consequent wage-cutting destroyed Applegarth's careful creation in his lifetime, though he built stronger than any of his contemporaries.

CHAPTER X

APPLEGARTH AND POTTER

PAYMENT BY THE HOUR * LAST AND APPLEGARTH AT BIRMINGHAM * THE "BEEHIVE" * THE STAFFORDSHIRE PUDDLERS

1860–1866

BEFORE the new organisations had found their feet, almost before they had been formed, a new attack of the employers' organisations convulsed the building trades and inflicted serious and lasting injury upon the operatives.

When the lock-out was drawing to a close, Potter called (January, 1860) a conference at Derby to establish a shorter hours association. This was attended at first by nearly all the building trades, but the masons and bricklayers withdrew in March, 1860, the plasterers followed and the only trades remaining were the carpenters and painters. All the same, George Potter, on behalf of his stillborn Association, resumed the agitation from May onwards for a nine-hour day. In the spring the London building trades as a whole were involved and memorials were sent in to three firms, of whom two, Kelk and Lucas, replied by a notice to the effect that they would henceforward pay each man by the hour, and therefore need trouble no more about the nine or any other hour day. The building trades at once struck their shops, which was answered by the members of the Master Builders' Association by a general announcement of hourly payment. The firms hoisting these notices, and adhering

to them in spite of the immediate reply of a strike, were less than 25 per cent. of the whole number of firms, but they included all but one of the big contractors.*

The alteration in the mode of payment, which has become universal, was a grave matter. A placard that Coulson of the London Order of Bricklayers issued, said truly :—" If we have no recognised number of hours a day, how can we withstand their capricious arrangements ? The injury that can be inflicted upon us in winter we know to be immense."† It has been argued‡ that the infliction of the hours system was a trifling defeat because the establishment of a normal working day prevented the extension of hours and reduction of rates that might easily have ensued. But this is only true of those trades which could enforce a practical limitation of hours, and only where and in so far as they could do so. Working of overtime was by no means uncommon, but the previous extra money—time and a half or time and a quarter—for it was lost. Moreover, two very grave immediate losses followed. The first was that the " short Saturday " to 4 o'clock was no longer paid as a full day, but by the hour.§ The second was that, instead of being told to stand off at the end of the day, an operative was dismissed at the end of an hour, and we find that in 1892 one hour's notice was accepted all over London.|| This disadvantage was gravest of all in the building trades, where rain stops work. Previously, the shortest recognised period in a day system had been a quarter-day: on the week system, of course, the master

* See Frederic Harrison's history of the 1861 struggle in O.S.M. *Returns*, June, 1862.

† O.B.S. various.

‡ Webb, 246.

§ O.B.S. Annual, 1919.

|| Henshaw, p. 6.

paid for wet or dry. Now the operative paid for wet weather: if it rained, he could be stood off for an hour, put on again, taken off again, and the master suffered no loss. This has still to be remedied: the operative is made still to suffer for the weather.

The building trades were not in a position to fight. The Amalgamated Carpenters and Amalgamated Painters withdrew at once and went back, "under protest" and subscribing to the strikers' funds. The organisations of the plasterers and plumbers were so weak that they broke down immediately after and returned unconditionally. The struggle was carried on by the bricklayers and masons alone. They paralysed the London jobs right through the autumn into the winter, and great delight was expressed when the newly formed London Trades Council, headed by George Potter, induced by deputation Sir George Lewis to withdraw some Sappers who had been lent as blacklegs to a contractor. But this helped little, nor was the masons' action in August in striking the country jobs of the objectionable firms more successful. The strike dragged on until June, 1862, when Harnott declared it as hopeless.

Potter's temerity had excited comment and unpopularity in the London Trades Council, in which the members of what was gradually forming itself into the "Junta" were in a majority, and tension grew worse until the explosion came in 1864.

Potter had behind him the traditional leadership of the London trades. He had sixteen to twenty local carpenters' societies who had held away from the amalgamation and formed themselves into a vague federation called "The United Metropolitan Societies of Carpenters and Joiners." He belonged himself to one of these societies (the Progressive—130 members) and to

no other. He had his powerful weekly paper, the *Beehive*, where he was well seconded by the veteran Chartist, Robert Hartwell. He had also founded a political society called the London Working-men's Association, in imitation of Lovett's famous Chartist society, but its strength is quite uncertain.

An equally direct rival to Applegarth and the "Junta" was the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners, which sprang into renewed activity with the appointment of Robert Last as secretary, in 1862. He was reappointed in 1864 in virtue of a constitutional change, by the vote of the whole society, which gave him greater authority than his predecessors. Nevertheless, the union was still a very primitive body, and tended to disregard what rules it had. When in 1863 St. Helens Lodge applied for the necessary permission to strike, was refused it, and struck all the same, the members of the union decided to support them in defiance of rule. The seat of government was movable, and the form of government the old method of propositions by Lodges through the circular. Last told the 1867 Royal Commission* that he could not tell the reserve funds or income of the society at all. The Lodges held the funds locally, and some were very wealthy, while the fund at headquarters was still forbidden to exceed £500.

As for income, "some might pay half-a-crown or five shillings and two or three contributions and then retire."

* The finest source of information about the building trades' unions in these years is the evidence before the Royal Commission of 1867. See the evidence of Applegarth (3 times), Potter, Harnott, Conolly (O.S.M.), Coulson, Howell, Williams (Plasterers), Houseley, MacDonald (Painters), Last: also Piper, Smith, Trollope, Mault, McDonald, Ashworth, Wilson, Bristow (masters): O'Neil (M.U.), Clarke, Mooney (local societies), Matson and Proudfoot (Associated Joiners), in that order

Trade and sick funds were not separated. It enforced, so far as it could, the old restrictions and struck frequently and light-heartedly. It at one time came into connection with the Amalgamated, by also joining in 1867 the United Kingdom Alliance of Organised Trades, a short-lived general federation. As was the natural result of the local executive and shifting seat of government, it tended to become confined to areas where the seat of government was or had recently been located. In 1866 whole areas of England had been lost: the General Union was utterly unknown in Scotland, the North-East, East Anglia, the Home Counties, Wales and the South and South-West of England. Its seat of government had recently been shifted from Nottingham to Manchester, and as a result its membership was mostly concentrated in the northern Midlands and in Lancashire and Cheshire.*

Robert Last,† when he took over the Society in 1862, found it had 3,821 members. He agitated for the introduction of some benefits and the appointment of a secretary on a national basis, which, as mentioned, was carried out in 1864. At that time he had good hopes of swallowing the smaller Amalgamated Society entire, and the 1863 rules instruct steps to be taken to bring in "the Metropolitan societies" and forbid a member to belong to two organisations. It was not, however, long before he realised that the fighting strength was not all on one side. The very first monthly report of the Amalgamated announced that four branches had been taken whole from the General Union. Applegarth carried the Sheffield Lodge out with him, and it entered into negotiations with the Burslem Lodge. The two together

* G.U. Annual, 1866-7.

† *b.* Norwich, 1829.

issued a circular urging that the whole society go over because of the absurd incompetence of the General Union constitution and officials. This was ineffective, and as a result of it and of alleged blacklegging by Amalgamated men at Bolton, Last announced that his members would treat A.S.C.J. members as non-unionists. Applegarth defeated this by threatening to sue him under the very conspiracy laws that he was himself so anxious to abolish!*

The open breach between Potter and Applegarth had been caused in April, 1864. In that month the building operatives of Birmingham had been locked out. Applegarth had gone down to Birmingham to try to induce both sides to accept arbitration : Potter had used the *Beehive* in a contrary sense. Applegarth got his way, but, indignant at the way the *Beehive* had hampered him and suppressed his speeches, stated that he would do all he could henceforward to crush it.† Henceforward the fight was a ding-dong battle. Potter replied by printing letters attacking him, telling him to remember " he is the *servant*, not the *Master*, of the Amalgamated Society," and asking him who told him to pay himself 15s. a week extra.‡

At the end of the same year the conflict was made more precise by a fresh outbreak in Birmingham. In December the masters tried to introduce a " discharge note " or leaving certificate drafted by the General Master Builders' Association, to make it impossible for any carpenter to be re-employed without a certificate of character by his late employer. This was presented first to the carpenters and joiners, and answered by an

* *Beehive*, March 4, 1865.
† *Beehive*, May 7, 28, June 4, 1864.
‡ *Beehive*, July 8, 1864.

immediate strike. Potter demanded that a general fund on a large scale should be raised to support the strikers, and in fact raised a certain amount of money : Applegarth refused to permit any Amalgamated money to be used except for members. In January it was announced that the Discharge Note was withdrawn. Applegarth from London, and Last from Manchester, arrived in Birmingham to make inquiries and discovered that the men were still out, because the master builders childishly refused to announce officially the withdrawal. A meeting was held, at which the two secretaries spoke, one after the other. Last, in accordance with the General Union policy, told the audience not to go back until they had everything down in black and white. Applegarth, with calculated violence, gave the meeting his new policy in its crudest and most offensive terms. He told them that they had no business to have struck at all without permission from his office, that they knew perfectly well the notice was withdrawn in fact, and that they ought, individually, to have ignored the trade's decision and gone back to work as soon as they heard the news. " I tell you honestly," he said, " that if I had been in Birmingham I should have been at my bench side on Monday morning last. Whenever the employers have tried to humiliate you and bring you to your knees I have been in the front to defend you ; now you are trying to humiliate the employers I will be no party to it." This speech was received with a howl of execration, not only at the meeting but throughout the country. Applegarth was sufficiently shaken by the abuse to modify a few phrases. Potter put out a programme by which workers' rules should be henceforward absolutely protected, and all unions should bind themselves to sign only agreements dealing with wages, hours and the principle of

arbitration. Last asked his organisation to start a drive in Birmingham to capture A.S.C.J. members by representing it as not a genuine trade organisation at all. Last's union, however, was unable to take such rapid action : Potter's programme was taken up by nobody : and the men in Birmingham did, in fact, go back as Applegarth advised. His executive not merely supported him, but passed a resolution curtailing the amount of expenses allowable to any strike committee. A motion was presented by a member, W. R. Cremer, to disallow Applegarth's expenditure, but the reason was personal spite, for Cremer fully agreed with his action.*

Potter had by this time lost his influence in the London Trades Council, of which he was a member. The prestige of this body was now such that it acted in some sort as an arbiter to the whole trade union world. A trade on strike that desired the assistance and approbation of other unions applied to the London Trades Council for credentials. If these were refused its chances of receiving much assistance were small. This power of granting or withholding credentials was used steadily to assist the spread of the new principles. In the winter of 1864, for example, the South Staffordshire colliers, appealing for aid to resist a reduction of wages, were met in the harshest manner by the London Trades Council. Danter, of the A.S.E., speaking for the Council, warned them that the Council did not approve of their methods. There had been stories of violence, and he was credibly informed that the colliers had actually had recourse to the provocative measure of having bands and processions. No aid would be given unless this was stopped.†

* See *Beehive*, December 10, 17, 24, 1864; January 21, 28, February 4, 18, 25, March 4, 1865 ; Humphrey, 129; G.U. Monthly, January 1865 ; Higgenbotham. † *Beehive*, October 29, 1864.

A serious dispute in 1865 induced Potter to try an attack on the power of the Trades Council. North Staffordshire puddlers had been on strike against a reduction, with the support of Kane's National Association of Ironfounders. The ironmasters threatened a general lock-out unless North Staffordshire gave way : Kane ordered them back and they refused. Potter knew quite well that it was no good attempting to gain the aid of the Trades Council in such a cause : he therefore, on a frivolous pretext, called a special meeting of all the London trades on his own authority to start a movement in support of the puddlers. The Trades Council was enraged, as much at the attack on its power as at the support given to Staffordshire. It condemned the puddlers for refusing to accept unconditionally the arbitration offered by a member of the House of Lords, and officially censured Potter at a wild meeting. He was denounced as a " strike monger and a strike jobber," and was accused of corruption, forgery of the *Beehive* accounts, and theft of funds. This was followed by an even wilder meeting of Potter's conference of Trades, at which Odger, on behalf of the Junta, repeated and elaborated the attack on Potter. When the meeting calmed down a little, Odger and Potter agreed to bring the charges before an arbiter, Beales of the Reform League and a jury, and the proceedings closed with " three groans for the Clique." It was unfortunate for the Clique that their charges, as a whole, collapsed when investigated, and Beales had to return a virtual acquittal: nevertheless, some mud stuck, and in September, at the re-election of the Trades Council, Potter was turned out. He had the meagre satisfaction that after expelling him the Clique's supporters left the meeting, and as a result

Coulson and Applegarth failed to get elected. All the same, the Council as a whole remained under the Junta's influence.*

Applegarth had convinced them that it was essential to smash Potter's influence altogether. "While such delusion," he said, "lasts as to Mr. Potter's power and influence, the suffrage will never be extended to our order."† A rival paper was started by the newly-founded "International," at Applegarth's suggestion, called *The Working Man's Advocate*, or *The Commonwealth*, but its success was small.

At the beginning of 1867 Potter's influence as a leader of the London trades was seriously impaired. The Amalgamated, in mere numbers as well as influence, was pressing the General Union very closely. The new ideas had forced their way in and had secured a strong foothold, both among the carpenters and the bricklayers, but it was impossible to say more. They had not as yet achieved a final victory. That was to come largely as a result of the legal trials and victories of the next few years, which commenced with the Royal Commission of 1867. But before these can be discussed, it is necessary to turn to the other unions which sprang up in the building trades and inquire how far the new principles were victorious in them.

* *Beehive*, March 11, 18, 25, April 1, 8, 29, June 24, September 2, 1865; O.B.S. Monthly, June, 1865.

† A.S.C.J. Monthly, May, 1865.

CHAPTER XI

THE TWO ORDERS OF BRICKLAYERS

EDWIN COULSON * GEORGE HOWELL * BENEFITS INTRODUCED * CONFLICT WITH MANCHESTER * MARKLEY DISPUTE

1862–1869

EDWIN COULSON, the secretary of the Operative Bricklayers' Society (London Order) was a great admirer of Applegarth and much subject to his influence. He fought for the principles of the new unionism as eagerly as his adviser. He told the Royal Commission of 1867 that he had as yet been able to impose only three benefits (trade, tramp, funeral), but intended to introduce "all the benefits we can as soon as possible." He fought Potter with a savagery quite foreign to Applegarth's coolness. There was a certain persistent difference of character and policy between the two men and between the two crafts that they represented. It has been suggested that the outdoor work of bricklayers, plasterers and masons makes them more rebellious than carpenters: however this may be, more than a little of the old Adam lurked in Coulson and his members. More than once he showed signs of spoiling for a fight with the employers. He was described as "bricky and stodgy" by an opponent.* What this probably referred to was his obstinacy. Coulson's main characteristic, indeed, was his obstinacy: every line of his photograph testifies to the immovable resolution of the grim old man. If he had taken a dislike to a man, or a decision for a certain

* Webb, 237.

policy, nothing shifted him. "We have no fair field and we ask no favour," he told the Trades Union Congress in 1881, and his loyalty to his class came out in another saying: "Capitalists tell us that the true interests of the workman lie in saving money, in using every effort to desert their own class and become masters. For what purpose? What does it profit us that half a dozen of our fellows in a generation should succeed in joining the war against the men who were formerly their comrades, and end, perhaps, by failing for half-a-million? No, we have a nobler morality and a higher aim than this: a feeling of brotherhood is the principle on which we will act, and our end shall be the elevation of our fellows—not into another class, but in their actions, their thoughts and their feelings."*

Coulson's first trial was in the payment-by-hour struggle of 1861, in which the bricklayers, as already mentioned, assisted the masons almost single-handed in the fight. Although the result could not be called a victory, it gave the O.B.S. a great urge forward. Of its 52 lodges reckoned next year, 25 were due to the dispute, and the "black" society founded by the employers had disappeared.† The Union enforced certain restrictions which it tried to conceal: it forbade piecework and kept labourers from using the trowel. It took no interest whatever in the question of apprenticeship, however, and that is a fair test to separate the new from the old unions. The masons, plumbers, and Manchester Order bricklayers attached the greatest importance to this, while the O.B.S., the Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners and the English plasterers took no notice of the question

* O.B.S. Rules, 1871.

† *Beehive*, March 28, November 21, 1863.

at all.* Again, in the same rule book quoted above, he reminded his members that the two fundamental principles of the Society were (1) that strikes were an evil to be avoided at all costs ; (2) that absolute discipline and obedience to rule was essential.

While he thus agreed on all important points with the Junta, he could not stomach all their members. In particular, he disliked and despised George Howell (1833-1910), a fellow-bricklayer, who was the first secretary of the London Trades Council. Howell was a self-taught man of considerable versatility, who had worked very hard for the bricklayers in the hour-payment dispute. His two great ambitions were to be a successful author and an M.P. in the Liberal interest, both of which he achieved. To Coulson his undoubted ability seemed suspicious. Coulson's interest in politics was very faint and due exclusively to Applegarth's influence, and he regarded Howell's politics as thinly veiled personal ambition : his versatility he attributed to dishonesty. As a result he attempted to drive Howell off the Trades Council, by having him withdrawn as O.B.S. representative. He publicly called him "a snob" and untrustworthy. The quarrel became open : Howell stated that Coulson wanted to prevent him getting a job, and announced his defiance of Coulson and his Executive "fearless of their frowns and threats and alike indifferent to their smiles."† He formed a cabal with the discharged secretary, Henry Turff, and ran against Coulson as secretary and for a place on the E.C. Both Turff and Howell got places on the Executive at one time or another, but neither of them came near to defeating Coulson for the secretaryship. They

* Howell, 213. The same is true of initiations.

† O.B.S. Quarterly, June 1867.

continued to fight him until 1870, when Turff gave it up and Howell joined the Manchester Order. But although personal quarrels separated them, Coulson and Howell were linked by a common policy. Howell never did anything to assist the Manchester Order and remained a most valuable assistant to the Junta.

Coulson, immediately after his examination by the 1867 Commission, induced his E.C. to consent to the introduction of a large number of new benefits. He pushed up the contributions in 1868 from 3d. a week to 10½d., in order to cover sick, accident and superannuation.* The natural effect of this violence was that the membership fell from five thousand to two thousand. Coulson did not yield or temporise : resistance stimulated his obstinacy and he recovered in a way that neither Applegarth on the one hand nor Houseley on the other would have used. He went round personally all the London districts, selecting men whom he knew were feared for truculence or respected for character, whether in the union or out, and persuading or intimidating them into becoming collectors for the jobs in which they were working. This shop steward organisation, after a while, put the O.B.S. on the up-grade again.

It would, indeed, have recovered much more quickly if Coulson had not been gravely troubled by the rival union, the Manchester Order. This union—the old Operative Society of Bricklayers of 1829, of which the London Order was an offshoot—viewed with considerable jealousy the progress of the London Order. It had originally in 1861 signed an agreement for joint tramp relief, assimilation of working rules and occasional joint conferences. This had been broken by the London Order opening a Lodge in a town belonging to

* Ruffell.

the Manchester Order (October, 1863) and the latter refused to renew the agreement. So strong was it in 1863, that the fear was actually expressed that its hostility would break up the London Order.

The Manchester Order was two or three times as strong in numbers as the London Order : it had six to seven thousand when Coulson took over two or three thousand from Turff. Its organisation and policy were of the usual old-fashioned type. It fought the hour system, pressed for apprenticeship limitation, and had only trade, accident and tramp benefit. Its lodges retained great independence, and the seat of government was movable. Its object was defined as " a fair day's wage for a fair day's work." Its old-fashioned forms of initiation, etc., which were retained till the very end of the century, were slightly abbreviated and altered forms of the Operative Builders' Union litany given in Chapter III. It had accumulated a considerable fund—£3,650 in 1866—but this was in daily jeopardy because it was customary to lend money from it to local lodges. Whether any coherent policy at all was pursued depended mainly upon the secretary. Lockett was dead. His successor, O'Neil, was removed in 1866, and the seat of government moved to Sheffield, because of suggestions of corruption, and because O'Neil was too " close " for safety's sake with the machine-wrecking brickmakers. His successor was George Houseley, a man who, although he remained secretary until 1890, never acquired the influence or possessed the vision to raise the society in the manner that Harnott or Allan did. He was narrow-minded, caring and knowing nothing of the general good of the working class or of the building operatives outside the Manchester Order. The progress and independence of that union were his

sole objects. In his efforts to assist it he had taken on clerical and administrative work for which, as a bricklayer, he was utterly unsuited. His temper, always violent, became soured: even the Lodges protested against his "mordacious language."* A just and sensible proposal for amalgamation in 1882 brought him to the verge of hysteria. Perpetually conscious that the union was decaying under his leadership, he suspected always a plot to oust him: among his papers after he left the name of G. H. Clarke (his successor) was found underscored deeply with the note *Watch this Man.*

As soon as the London Order spread northwards, which it did in 1863, conflict was sure to come. From that date onwards little conflicts occurred all over the country. Manchester began the offensive generally by forcing the London men to join their Order or lose their jobs, but London responded actively enough. Agreements were patched up for the moment, as in 1869, only to be violated again almost immediately. Whittingham,† of the Manchester Order, was struck against four times in one week in Ashton-under-Lyne, and the London Order actually broke up the other society's lodge in Oldham itself. In 1869 conflict was so intense that Houseley pretended to accept the mediation of the Junta, which found (as was perfectly easy had the will been there) a basis of agreement, which was no sooner signed than it was declared void because of the Markley dispute.

Henry Markley was a Manchester member of the London Order. In the year 1869 the Manchester Order was locked out to enforce arbitration and payment by the hour. Sufficient ill-feeling had been excited for

* November, 1881.

† Whittingham.

EDWIN COLLSON

From a photograph in the possession of Mr. F. Ruffell.

Markley to lead a blackleg movement. The Manchester Lodge of the London Order (opened by Coulson personally) marched in to the "black" jobs *en masse*. Markley sent round to every lodge a notice "Any member desirous of coming here will be guaranteed a job," acted as scab-recruiter for the masters, and got as many as seventeen lodges to support him. He was pulled sharply up by Coulson and the E.C., but insolently threw back on them their own principles, declaring that he had acted as he did only "as preferring *arbitration* to *strikes*." Enraged, Coulson got the Lodge dissolved and him expelled. But Markley belonged to the General Council, which represented the provincial as well as London Lodges, and was theoretically the final authority. He called it together, got its support. Here, for Coulson, was the inversion of the same problem as Applegarth faced later. He dealt with it similarly. Regardless of legality, he induced the E.C. to shut the office doors in the face of the General Council, which had, in time, to return home. Markley attempted to form a new society and gained no support. All the same, his actions had lost the Manchester dispute, and made an agreement for the moment impossible. He had also shaken Coulson's position in the society, for an aggregate meeting of London lodges held after the event was addressed by Howell and passed a resolution "thoroughly condemning" Coulson for vacillation.*

From that time onwards the history of the two societies is a monotonous exchange of insulting letters between Houseley and Coulson. The obstacles to an agreement were mainly on the former's side. His resolution was shaken in 1872 when Coulson, with characteristic

* O.B.S. Monthly, September, 1869, and various.

ruthlessness opened a fresh lodge in Manchester itself and induced his Executive to pass a resolution that they would draft down a full complement of O.B.S. members to every job where the Manchester men struck against a London man. Next year the O.B.S. sued Houseley's union for intimidation at Barrow, for striking against their members, and gained the case. At this the Manchester Order gave way and renewed the original agreement. This meant a sort of truce in which the previous guerrilla warfare died down into petty local squabbling.

By its signature Coulson had gained a considerable victory over the larger union, which had utterly failed in its secret desire to crush its rival. But, although his union was stronger for its size, more closely knit and powerful, it could not claim to be as yet clearly the superior. Houseley's membership kept a thousand or two ahead—in 1875 it was 7,169 to 4,832—and not until after the testing time of 1878-1880 did the Manchester Order drop to a position of striking and incontestable inferiority.

CHAPTER XII

THE STRUGGLE IN OTHER UNIONS
1860-1872

1. PLASTERERS : ORIGINS * C. O. WILLIAMS' PRINCIPLES
2. PLUMBERS : ORIGINS * GREAT CONSERVATISM
3. PAINTERS : CRAFT DECLINE * AMALGAMATED FAILURES * MANCHESTER ALLIANCE
4. BRICKMAKERS : VIOLENCE IN MANCHESTER * W. BURN IN LONDON * COLLAPSE
5. SAWYERS : MILL SAWYERS' UNION
6. SCOTTISH UNIONS : MASONS RECOVER * HART * MATTHEW ALLAN * STRENGTH OF THE UNION * ASSOCIATED CARPENTERS AND JOINERS * THEIR ORIGIN * SLATERS
7. THE OPERATIVE STONEMASONS : STILL THE STRONGEST * HARNOTT'S GREAT POWER * HIS CONSERVATISM * HIS DEATH

BRICKLAYERS and Carpenters together form incontestably the most important branches of the building trades. They might, in 1862, have had to admit the Stonemasons, who were certainly not "amalgamated," to some sort of equality. Still, the successes of the new principles in those two trades gave them a considerable foothold, although in other branches of the building industry the conflict was indecisive, and into some the new principles had not penetrated at all.

§ 1

In one of the newly-organised trades, the Plasterers, an attempt was made from the beginning to organise upon amalgamated lines. The date of the origin of the present National Association of Operative Plasterers is

uncertain. Office tradition gives it as 1860, C. Owen Williams to the 1867 Commission gave it as 1859, while the Nine-hours' Committee of 1858 records in October of that year the receipt of a letter from " Mr. Wheeler, General Secretary of the Plasters."* Later, however,† C. O. Williams gave the date as March, 1860, at a delegate meeting held that year in Birmingham, and this date seems most probable. For its first year the Association had no central funds except what were provided by voluntary levies, and seems to have been a loose federation like the Manchester Alliance of House Painters. At the next conference Charles Owen Williams, a Liverpool plasterer who had had much local experience of trade unionism, challenged the constitutoin. He declared that it was hopelessly out of date, and demanded a number of reforms, which would have turned it into a centralised society with some central funds, although not quite so highly developed as the A.S.C.J. The existing officials, it appears, argued that the proposed rules were absurd and impossible to administrate: Williams himself, they said, could not work them though he proposed to make others do so. " Dared " like this, Williams replied that he would take it on, if they moved the headquarters to Liverpool. The meeting took him at his word, and at the beginning of 1862 a central fund was started and Williams became General Secretary, with 1,171 members.‡

We do not know exactly what was the constitution of the union at this period, but looking back upon it in 1877, Williams observed, "What are the two great principles we are lauding ? First, that as an Association

* 1858 Minutes.

† Plast. Monthly, 1885, March.

‡ Plast. Monthly, 1880, May. Direct records only begin in 1873.

we do not allow any Strike without it being subjected to the most careful investigation, and all legal and honourable means resorted to to prevent such a lamentable state of affairs as a civil war between employed and employers. . . . Where we have expended one pound on Strike Pay, kindred Associations have spent one thousand . . . the second great element of our success is our financial arrangement." He was heart and soul in the amalgamated movement. "The history of Capital and Labour since the formation of Trade Societies has demonstrated that the interests of both are indissolubly bound together," he wrote in the same number.* In 1880 he "rejoiced" because, although the Society had lost members, the reserve funds per head had become greater. All through his period of administration the membership figures shoot up and down, but one thing never varies, and that is the money "put away" each year. From 1s. 10d. per member in 1863 it rises to 51s. 9d. in 1879.

But Williams was not Applegarth, nor was his task the same. The Plasterers never took so kindly to amalgamated principles as the Carpenters: they were prepared for high benefits and high subscriptions, but they were not prepared to abandon their aggressive policy. Moreover, Williams was a better speaker than organiser: he was genuinely enthusiastic for his principles, but competence in office work he acquired very slowly and he made many mistakes, although eventually he worked out a system of book-keeping which (like Applegarth's) has hardly been altered. He never learnt the art of impressing himself on either assistants or Executive Committees. His period of office was one long series of small and great quarrels

* Plast. Annual, 1877.

with his Executive or the society. Business had continually to be held over until one or the other party recovered from a fit of temper. "We asked a simple question one day," complained one year's auditors, "and the effect on the General Secretary was quite enough for us to avoid asking any more questions for fear of a serious result."* He had the further disadvantage of being out in the provinces and unable to rely, like other weaker men, upon the advice of the Junta. He was left entirely upon his own resources, and sometimes was utterly unable to control his members, who dragged him, lamenting and prophesying evil, into bellicose adventures which shocked him deeply. He had had to admit to the 1867 Commission that his members had struck in Bradford to force an employers' son to join the union, also that lodges still retained considerable funds of their own, but urged a little pathetically that the Association had rules insisting upon good work and preventing scamping.†

In 1864, having barely started, the Association was dragged into a number of small strikes and one large one (Birmingham), which shook it very badly; it pulled up and in 1867 rose to nearly 5,000 members. In that year Williams' members "bolted." It appears that they wished to fight the hour-payment system, and he tried to prevent it. Some Lodges seceded; then he gave way and was at once saddled with conflicts in Manchester, Sheffield, Glasgow, Swansea, Leeds, Burnley, Wigan and Torquay. Heavy levies were called for, and the Association looked like breaking up. In 1870 it was down to 2,261 members.‡ About this time, also—

* Plast. Annual, 1883.
† 1867 Committee, Williams.
‡ Plast. Annual, 1881.

the exact date is uncertain—the Association lost its London members. The contractor in charge of the building of Alexandra Palace refused to pay the plasterers travelling money from the centre of London, and a strike was threatened. Williams, true to his policy of stopping strikes, opened a lodge at Wood Green, from which the job could be supplied without the question of fares arising. This action so irritated the London operatives that in the end they broke away to form a "Metropolitan Association" confined to London.*

From 1870 onwards, however, the Association began to recover. Williams was still very pessimistic. He predicted ruin in nearly every annual report, and strove regularly to heighten contributions. But the ruin did not come. Quarrels did not cease, but business began to be done in spite of them. The Association recovered its membership and even passed the old figure in 1876. It had moved to Birmingham in 1869, and in 1875 bought permanent offices. Its income in that year was £9,502, and in 1877 was nearly fourteen thousand pounds. By that year Williams was definitely in control and his policy in the ascendant. There are no trade movements to record—that was part of his policy—and we have nothing to do but to watch, as he did, the slow but gratifying accumulation of money in the bank.

§ 2

In the plumbing trade the older trade unionism was not challenged. There were, indeed, hardly any trade unionist plumbers in London at all. There was a West End Journeymen Plumbers' Society, meeting at the Cape of Good Hope Tavern, and in 1873 there were three such local clubs, with 130 members. They were

* Lamb.

quite unaffected by the amalgamation movement, and were swept away in the great depression of 1878.* The new union formed in this period was confined to Scotland and the North of England, and has a direct connection with the old O.P.G. The members of the Manchester Lodge, which was all that remained of the old society, had retained the title "Operative Plumbers' and Glaziers' Society" and most of the old rules. They still paid their officers with a pint of ale for every committee meeting, and retained the rules for moral improvement. They had now, however, excluded from their meetings master-plumbers (who could be members)† and their books were no longer full of entries for beer money. Their numbers were few, but they had acquired a number of active new members, among whom was W. Jaffrey—afterwards a most reactionary employer.

In 1865 the Manchester Society entered into negotiations with the local Liverpool Society, and between them they agreed upon the basis for a National Plumbers' Society. The secretary of the Liverpool Society, J. H. Dobb, then called a conference in Liverpool, to which these rules were submitted. The towns which were represented and formed the new United Operative Plumbers' Association were Liverpool, Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, Bradford, Birmingham, Chester, Dundee, Lancaster, Preston, Blackburn, Leicester—no south-country orWelsh towns at all. The constitution, rules and policy of the Society were old-fashioned, and not unlike the stonemasons'. They enforced apprenticeship and forbade piecework. The strike question was settled by the rule of thumb:

* Beeston.

† Plumbers' Rules, 1857, Nos. 14, 24-27, 32.

" a distinct understanding that no two Lodges enter on a dispute at the same time, but take it by rotation according to date of application."* Head Office was movable—it began by being at Liverpool—and the amount of business transacted there was very small. The expenditure per quarter was under £6, exclusive of Dobb's (half-time) salary, which was three-halfpence per member per quarter, advanced him by the four principal lodges, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Liverpool and Manchester. Lodges held their own funds, which were equalised at the end of the year by a complicated equalisation fund. The form of the Quarterly Returns, modes of "propositions," etc., are strongly reminiscent of the masons.

In 1866 the Association had 1,509 members in 31 Lodges, and the figure varied very little. When Dobb resigned in July, 1868, and George May took his place, the figures were still only 1,664. They actually declined to 1,226 in 1870, and 1,194 in 1871. " We know that we have unity in the several Lodges," observed the secretary, "but what is more desired is unity of Lodges with the Association." In the hope of gaining this, some modifications were made in the rules in 1868. It was decided that the consent of the society was necessary for a Lodge to strike for an advance. (But, then, if it was refused the Lodge might still strike at its own expense.) A General Managing Committee (G.M.C.) was elected from the whole society to carry on the business of the society.† Lack of funds made its meetings infrequent.

These measures of centralisation, small though they were, raised the anger of some members. In particular, the " parent of the Association," Manchester, regarded

* O.P.Q.R. 1867, July.

† O.P.Q.R. 1870, October; O.P. Rules, 1868.

them as an intrusion. In a circular to the Society, it stated that " when a deputation from Manchester met a deputation at Liverpool, the basis on which an Association of Plumbers was to be founded was agreed upon between the Liverpool and Manchester societies," and left it to be inferred that any change in the original rules could only be by consent of the members of the old O.P.G. Bickering continued for three years till, in 1870, the explosion came. The Manchester Lodge claimed that it had suffered a loss on the equalisation fund and held up all remittances until it was satisfied. The G.M.C. rejected the claim and accused Manchester of forgery. (Manchester Lodge on every question cast its full vote of 200 members and refused to answer questions as to the number present at the meeting.) It nevertheless made some attempt to conciliate Manchester, even sending down a deputation which the Lodge refused to see. In the end, Manchester was excluded and attempted to revive the old O.P.G. The ground was cut away from under its feet, however, by the foundation of a new lodge in Manchester by the G.M.C., and its venture ended in failure.*

Weakened by this, the society was further shaken by the secession of Glasgow in 1872. Glasgow had for some time been intriguing with other Scottish lodges for the formation of an independent Scots society, on the ground that more money went out of Scotland than came into it. The Association managed to hold most of the Scottish lodges, but enough broke away to found a small rival society which persisted in spite of the foundation of a new Glasgow lodge in 1875.† The Association had no chance to make a proper recovery.

* O.P.Q.R. 1871, January.

† O.P.Q.R. September, 1872; March, 1875.

The membership kept fluctuating about 1,600, and funds were so low that the G.M.C. could only meet once a year and the direction of affairs was left almost entirely to the half-time secretary. This in itself led to complaints of arbitrariness, and in 1873 a Delegate Meeting made a further timid step by substituting a permanent, full-time paid secretary, William J. Barnett, in place of George May, and substituting for the General Managing Committee an Executive Committee selected by the lodge that was the seat of government. This was as far as the Plumbers consented to go in the direction of efficiency, for many years.

§ 3

In one building trade alone, however, is it possible to say that the old system, represented by Manchester union, gained a victory in this period over the new. This trade was painting, and the reason for the victory of the Manchester Alliance, which was a union of the most primitive kind, over the various London amalgamated societies, is to be found in the character of the trade, and its alteration since 1833. Painters were organised in local societies only. Some of these were extremely old : we have already noted the club of 1749, and the St. Martin's Society (London—called the " Original Society ") dated back to 1779. Every such society had its own traditions, finance and peculiar character. The Phœnix, or Old Cave, as already remarked, required its members to wear top-hats and coats. With this individual character went a strong sense of independence and love of isolation. A " Western Union," of which nothing is known, was formed in 1822,* and the clubs as a whole were swept up into the O.B.U. in 1833, but, apart from these, no trace remains of any

* *Beehive*, October 24, 1863.

movement towards national unity until the foundation of the very weak federation, the Manchester Alliance, in 1856.

During the thirty years of practical non-unionism—1833 to 1863—the whole craft of painting had undergone a grave change. Unionism, this change showed, was the only guarantee under the competitive system for even fair work: left to itself, free competition made shoddy work and scamping universal. Unskilled labourers were poured in, and the jobbing master painters enforced work that was often cheating as well as bad. A rank-and-file member of the Alliance, some while later, described accurately the disease and its effect on the operatives :—

" I believe " (he wrote) " the cause of the deplorable " state of our trade is the amount of jerrying which is " practised. It is no uncommon thing, on jobs which are " contracted for by our employers, to have three and four " coats of paint, not only to get two, but in many cases " absolutely one. I need not here take up space in " describing the very many ways in which this system " of robbery is carried on, such as using size in the place " of paint, whitening ceilings without first washing " them off, and a variety of other ways which I am sure " are familiar to the whole of our members. Hence it is " that jobs that should last six months last three, and " jobs that should last three months last six weeks. It is " thus that our trade is so diminished that it will not " allow those who follow it the bare necessaries of " life."*

There was lack of organisation in other building trades—for example, in plumbing—and consequent

* Letter from "An Alliance Member" in the Alliance Quarterly for January, 1875.

scamping, but the degradation of the craft was nowhere so deep as in painting. Bad plumbing was common, almost the rule, but it was impossible for an operative plumber to be absolutely without any skill at all. Some rule-of-thumb knowledge was necessary to set and solder pipes, however badly ; but master painters could and did put totally unskilled labour, after perhaps half-a-day's instruction, on to slapping paint anyway on their jobs. In the 'twenties and 'thirties painting work was done as a craft, and done extremely well. The artistic result might be unpleasant, but the technical work was almost always beyond reproach. For example, a jobbing painter's book of 1825-1830 describes this as a cheap way of painting white with a dull enamel gloss, favoured by Trego's* :—Three coats of paint with a careful rub between each coat, then one coat of varnish white made with white oil varnish, turpentine, and Kremnitz white ; then two coats of varnish with a little Kremnitz white added, after which it may be polished in the usual way. If we compare this with the complaint given above, or even with painting as it is done to-day, we realise how great was the fall.

With the incursion of labourers came the growth of the idea—largely false—that painting could generally only be done during the summer and during the winter the painter must be idle. The result was the casualisation of the trade as a whole : a certain percentage of painters, attached usually to large firms, remained craftsmen fairly sure of employment, but for the rest the trade became assimilated, both in pay and personnel, to general labouring. Painters' wages were nearly always a penny or more an hour below current rates in building, and as late as 1873 George Shipton lamented " our

* Lecture by J. Elliott in *Journal of Decorative Art*, December, 1920.

trade is a byword among other trades."* They were unable to pay the high subscriptions required by the new amalgamated union, and the gallant efforts made on their behalf failed.

The first of these attempts followed immediately upon the end of the lock-out. In the same manner as the A.S.C.J., the Amalgamated Association of Operative Painters was formed in 1860 by the amalgamation of existing London clubs. Its first General Secretary, William Pike, chosen in 1861, was prosecuted next year for embezzling £13 and Robert Shaw took his place in November, 1862.† Shaw was an acquaintance of Applegarth's, an honest, careful and industrious man, afterwards secretary of the International, and so far as personal character went, well suited to his office. He immediately drafted and put before the conference in February a scheme for the regularisation of finances, to correspond more exactly with the Carpenters and Joiners. This was adjourned till the next conference, in the autumn of 1863. When this met, it was discovered that members were rapidly declining. Whole Societies had resumed their independence, and the old stalwarts of the Cave and other societies had failed to attend for a considerable time past. No further mention is made of the Society, but some time next year it broke up. It had started level with the A.S.C.J.

A fresh attempt was made in 1865 by a local society called the London Central, which called a meeting of local clubs in May, to consider fresh organisation and a forward movement. The clubs moved very cautiously and agreed in December to form a "General Council"

* L.P. Annual, 1873.

† For the A.A.O.P., see *Beehive*, November 22, 1862; February 28, September 26, 1863.

or " General Association," with rules in which " great care was taken " to prevent any interference with the independence of local societies. This weak body existed for an uncertain period, and even opened branches in Dundee and Cardiff, but its powers were very small. In 1866 discontent with its feebleness and inability to support strikers, led to the formation of another amalgamated union, the London General Association of Amalgamated House Painters, to support a painters' strike for 7½d. an hour, begun in June. Its first secretary was one E. G. Davies, but after the first few days his place was taken by George Shipton, who spent his life in support of amalgamated principles in the painting trade. Very shortly afterwards Shaw, who felt himself deserted by the " Junta," broke away from the General Council, carrying with him a few societies, and joined the Manchester Alliance, which now made its first appearance in London. Thus there were three weak bodies struggling for the few trade unionist painters in London*—the General Council, the Amalgamated and the Manchester Alliance.

The General Council wavered for a while. In October, 1867, it formed a joint committee with the Alliance and against the Amalgamated, which had now appointed a full-time secretary (still Shipton), but at the beginning of the new year it recognised its own impotence and agreed to a reorganisation upon amalgamated principles. Rules were prepared and adopted which provided for all the benefits that could be suggested—Out of work, sick, funeral, superannuation, accident, emigration,

* *Beehive*, May 27, September 16, November 18, December 2, 1865 ; January 27, February 10, June 23, June 30, July 7, July 14, July 21, October 27, November 17, December 15, 1866 ; April 27, August 24, October 26, 1867 ; January 11, 1868.

and benevolent grant. The rules were deposited and registered : the old amalgamated society dissolved, and the General Council likewise vanished in the new body, called the Amalgamated Society of House Decorators and Painters. The elements of the General Council that objected went over to the Manchester Alliance. The new Society had 13 branches, in the South of England exclusively. The same summer, however, it was in difficulties. It had to forbid its branches to correspond with the Alliance and could only muster 420 members on August 1st (1868). It was further harassed by the London Council, formed by the Manchester Alliance in October. By the autumn of 1869 Shipton was complaining again of secessions, and by 1871 the Association had ceased to exist in all but name.* Shipton himself suspected the high subscriptions of being the cause of these monotonous failures. A shilling a week was the rate, and he explained the failure by the fact that many painters had joined the Oddfellows, or other bodies, for friendly benefits and thus would not wish to pay twice for the same benefits. This excuse contained some truth, but applied equally to other trades where amalgamation did not fail. He also blamed certain financial provisions which permitted those who joined in the first three months to become qualified for benefits in six instead of twelve months. The result was an inrush of thrifty old gentlemen at the beginning, who almost at once went on one or other of the benefits, and after draining the funds dry left the Society. The average age of all entrants in the first three months was over 40.†

* *Beehive*, February 22, April 11, April 18, May 2, May 9, June 13, October 10, 1868 ; August 7, 1869.

† L.P. Annual, 1873.

On the other hand, the Manchester Alliance prospered during this period, and it ascribed its prosperity, correctly, to its advocacy of the very principles which Applegarth was attacking. In welcoming the malcontents who refused to take part in the London amalgamation of 1868, it remarked :—

" It may not be out of place to notice that most of the " above societies were formerly in connection with the " London General Association of House Painters, which " has been dissolved. The new organisation of Painters " is not adapted to the popular wants, while its main " objects are assurance and large benefits, rather than " the promulgation of General Union and Trades' " principles. While our organisation does not overlook, " but includes, charitable objects, we devote more " attention towards securing a larger share in the " proceeds of our labour. During the past year, " 1868, with all the drawbacks of bad trade and " bitter hostility from Employers' combinations, the " wages of our members have been increased equal " to £1,000."*

Nevertheless, there was no " class war " philosophy behind the Alliance policy. Its secretary, William MacDonald, a considerable pamphleteer, described himself as " a follower of Richard Cobden, the apostle of Free Trade," who believed that all things, morality as well as trade union policy, were to be found in the inspiring maxim " Buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest."† The same society that published the remarks above on the need for a militant policy had the year before praised the Master Painters' Association of Manchester for setting up a compulsory board of

* Alliance, 1868, second half-yearly report.

† MacDonald, 13, *Beehive*, July 13, 1867.

arbitration, composed half of operatives and half of masters, whose decision should be final and " make lock-outs and strikes impossible."*

It was an example of the primitive unionism supported by Potter even more extreme than the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners. It was hardly a union at all. It was founded in 1855† as a result of a conference representing tiny clubs in Manchester, Ashton, Stockport, Hyde, Macclesfield, Nottingham and Sheffield (400 members all told). It was formally launched next year as the " Manchester Alliance " (a title nominally changed in 1870 to General Alliance, but the old name was used to the end) and received adhesions from West Bromwich, Walsall, Preston, Liverpool and Blackburn. Not till 1866 did it appoint a regular Executive Council or Grand Council at all : it remained strictly an " alliance." The local societies retained their sovereignty, their own names and their own finance. The Alliance was not supposed to have any sort of control over them, and MacDonald, as general secretary till 1867, treated his job almost as a sinecure. He confessed to the Royal Commission that year that he had no idea what the funds of the Alliance were, as each Society kept its own funds and did not inform him. Some Societies were fairly rich. The membership he gave as 3,980.

Considerable advances were gained locally by painters' clubs in 1866, and in September of that year MacDonald, who had been accused of neglect, became " Honorary or Corresponding Secretary," while the post of General Secretary was filled by Thomas Sharples, who had been Treasurer since 1860, and was to remain Secretary until

* Alliance, 1867.

† 1867 Committee; MacDonald gives 1852, an error. Alliance 1880.

1890. He was born in 1819, and was regularly apprenticed to the trade in the old-fashioned way. He spent most of his working life in Manchester, working for the London and North Western Railway at its Longsight works. In 1856 he took the main part in forming the Alliance by persuading both the Manchester Old and Manchester New Societies to join.* He was the first secretary to issue and preserve reports. But he made no further changes, and the constitution of the Society was little altered until 1885. When he took over, 58 towns were " in Alliance." The membership was uncertain and for some years was not given in reports. A small central fund existed, maintained by levies only, which was used for the support of societies on strike. If the strike was for an advance movement, the central funds could only be used by permission. Even this was not left to the E.C. : a special Investigation Committee was elected in each case to see to the matter. The nominal governing body was the Executive Council, elected by the societies in the town that was the seat of government, which was in its turn subject to a " Chief Executive " or " Grand Council," representing all the Alliance and meeting twice a year. The Alliance consequently had " very little control over the societies."† Societies drifted in and out as they liked, quarrelled with one another, and in one case at least (Blackburn) the conflict between " New " and " Old " Societies became so violent that both left the Alliance to settle it outside.

In spite of its obvious weaknesses and distracted counsels, the Alliance prospered. While London Amalgamateds were withering every year, it increased the number of societies adhering from 58 in 1866 to 66

* *Beehive*, January 29, 1876 ; September 8, 1866.

† Henry Crompton, *Industrial Conciliation*, p. 118.

in 1873, and 72 in 1874. The general policy of the Alliance was necessarily very vague, and limited to points on which all societies were agreed. Making a virtue of necessity it had departed from an almost universal rule in accepting piecework rates in the skilled branches of graining, marbling, and sign-writing. Moreover, "while other trades had engaged in combating the hour system and arbitration the House Painters had freely adopted those principles."* The reason for their acceptance of payment by the hour lay in the seasonal character of the trade. A painters' working year in 1870 was estimated as eight months, and naturally the operative painter had no great interest in movements for the shortening of the working day in summer. Since employment was unobtainable in the winter, he was anxious to work as many hours as possible in the summer at so much per hour, in order to make provision for enforced idleness later.

The history of the Society under Sharples' guidance was uneventful. It suffered badly from a common disease of youthful unions, dishonest officials—the treasurer of the Manchester Society, William Dodd, absconded with £800 in 1868. For the most part the history is a record of local strikes of no particular interest. It is perhaps worth mentioning that a Bradford lock-out was fought in 1868 by the establishment of a Co-operative Painting Society by the operatives. The net result of the ten years from 1860 to 1870 was the usual product of societies run on the old basis—the favouring of the seat of government against the rest. In 1870† the Manchester Painters had 9½d. an hour—a rate as high as the masons and ½d. above plumbers and

* Alliance, 1872, April Quarterly.

† Alliance, 1870, October Quarterly.

slaters, while painters' rates elsewhere were : London, 7½d. ; Liverpool, Oldham and Southport, 6½d. ; Sheffield, Bradford and Halifax, 6d. ; Leicester, 5¾d. ; Huddersfield, 5½d. ; Crewe, 5d. Nevertheless, the administration of the Society seems to have given satisfaction, and up till 1874, when Sharples was appointed full-time secretary, the operative painters, as a whole, had decidedly marked their preference for the old Manchester type of organisation.

§ 4

In another trade there is little question of new or old unionism. In it trade unionism had hardly begun before it was crushed : its birth was its death.

Brickmaking was looked on by Posthlethwayt in 1774 as " a very mean employ," and the brickmakers all over Great Britain had always lower wages and a worse reputation for violence than any other branch of the building trades. Their conditions were bad and no record exists of any national union even in the 1833 period. Their organisations had remained in the undeveloped stage of local clubs. Nevertheless, they were far from being unskilled workers. Brickmaking—by hand, not machinery, of course—required very considerable skill and within the brickyard there was a surprising hierarchy of skilled, half-skilled and unskilled workers. The fully skilled brickmaker was the " moulder " who was directly hired by the employer and frequently paid his assistants himself, as a spinner does a piecer. Beneath him were Off-Bearers, Temperers, Wall-flatters, Pugboys, Pushers-Out, and Barrow-loaders,* who were generally not admitted to the local clubs and were sometimes little more than general labourers under another name.

* *Knott v. Hinckley*, February, 1866, in O.B.S. various.

The isolated organisations of the Brickmakers did not even cover each one town. In the outskirts of London, one of the main brickmaking centres, there were an uncertain number of brickmakers' unions. In the outskirts of Manchester there were a dozen at least. Nor were these societies always on good terms. The Stockport Brickmakers' Union had a bitter feud with the Manchester and Salford Brickmakers' Burial Society, and forbade the employment of a Manchester man if a Stockport man could be found. One firm, whose misfortune it was to be situated near the boundary, had its bricks first damaged by the Stockport society for employing Manchester men, and then by the Manchester society for employing Stockport men. Such incidents, however, were exceptional, and organised violence of any kind does not appear till the year 1861, and for some five or six years fills the history of Manchester brickmaking, until in 1867 the Royal Commission to investigate the Sheffield "rattening" brought into the light also the outrages in Manchester.

The date—1861—in which destroying of bricks and violence first began* is of importance because it coincides with the introduction of machinery into brickmaking, and the violence that ensued was in some cases directly traceable to the introduction of this machinery. Just as in the case of the sawyers, we have organised violence occurring because of the introduction of machinery, and because the employers introduced this machinery utterly without regard to the rates of pay given, or the suffering induced among the handworkers.

* *Manch. Report:* Slater : "There was nothing of this sort in the year 1861." The Report is practically the only evidence for northern Brickmakers' organisations. See evidence of Meadows, Singleton, Slater (twice), Jones, Simpson, Cox, Harrop, Hipwell, Barlow T and J., Harrison, Smith, Wyatt, Atkins, Renshaw.

In neither case had the workers the insight or the organisation to do as the shoemakers did in a similar case—organise the machine operatives to demand the same standard rates and conditions as the hand operative, and thus not only make slower and more equable the inrush of new machinery, but also prevent any general lowering of conditions. Unable to do this, the brickmakers had recourse to violence and machine-breaking as a last resort. The outrages were in no way, as was freely alleged at the time, a sign of the depravity of the workers: they were the natural and inevitable resource of men driven to utter desperation.

Renshaw and Atkins, two Manchester brickmakers, set up brickmaking machinery in 1861. Renshaw's engine was blown up by the union the same year, Atkins' engine blown up rather later. Smith, one of the first employers to follow their example, found iron continually thrown into the machines. In the next two or three years the local societies carried out the destruction of machinery and the spoiling of machine-made bricks over the whole Manchester area. One firm had as many as 50,000 bricks spoilt at one raid.* In 1862, while returning from one of these brick-spoiling expeditions, a group of Ashton brickmakers were observed at dawn by an Inspector, Harrop, and a Constable Jump. They were masked and showed every sign of their recent occupation. The two officers attempted to stop them: they killed Jump and injured the inspector. The affair excited great attention, did the Ashton Union much harm, and was partly responsible for the appointment of the 1867 Commission. Two convictions for murder were gained by the police and one man was hanged.

* *Manch. Report*, Singleton.

The danger run by the Unions in the Jump prosecution was sufficient to make them realise that their sectional existence was no longer of any value. They brought together a committee of representatives from local societies in Manchester, Liverpool, Oldham, Wigan, Stockport, Birkenhead, St. Helens, and Sheffield for the defence of the Jump case, and after its end they secured the amalgamation of eight unions into one Brickmakers' Society.* Henceforward, the Manchester and district brickmakers obeyed generally one direction, that of James Kay, of Manchester. The machine breaking and brick spoiling were now organised and paid for regularly, being entered as "sundries" in the accounts. The prices of these "jobs" varied: Slater was given £15 to divide between six men for burning down Thorneby's barn.

Such tactics did not arrest the spread of machinery. The compact which they had probably arranged with the Manchester Order of Bricklayers, by which the latter refused to use machine-made bricks, was of little use because of the weakness of the bricklayers' organisation. So we find the brickmakers driven further and further down. The fiercer and more savage character of their reprisals on their employers marks clearly the great distress into which they were being driven. From spoiling bricks, they turned to burning sheds. From burning sheds to hamstringing horses. From that, to an attempt—or such it seemed—to burn an employer in his house. Finally, with the introduction of a hand-machine in some Reddish works, and the refusal by the master of a compensating increase in pay, we find a case of an apparently deliberate attempt

* *Manch. Report*, Harrison.

by authorised agents of a union to beat scabs to death,* for which they were sentenced to twenty years imprisonment.

Such were the struggles of this dying industry, met by the authorities not with alleviation or assistance, but with repression and judicial severity. When the Commission visited Manchester in 1867, the brickmakers' organisations were already declining, and a few years later no trace of them is to be found.

As if to show that this disaster was in no way the result of Manchester's violence, the same fate overwhelmed the London Brickmakers. Organisation by trade clubs only had reduced them to so low a level that the London trade unionists felt it impossible for them to raise themselves by their own exertions. They therefore brought in a very well-known trade unionist from outside the brickmaking industry to organise them. William Burn was in 1859 in very distressed circumstances. He had originally been a cordwainer, but had for twenty-seven years devoted his main strength to the Trade Union movement. He had acted as secretary or voluntary organiser to almost every strike or lock-out committee that required his services.† Now he was blacklisted by the employers and could get no employment ; so a job was found for him which was thought suited his powers. He was made General Secretary of the new Friendly United Society of Operative Brickmakers. He was an experienced trade union official, well in touch with the Junta, and would not countenance any of the wild despairing violence of Manchester. For a while his enormous energy held back the tide of disaster. He collected about a thousand members (confined to London), and in 1864, with the assistance of the London trades

* *Manch. Report :* Meadows. † S.O.M. *Returns*, July, 1859.

generally, carried on an obstinate struggle against a reduction in wages, which ended in a half-victory. At the same time, the Birmingham Brickmakers had been forced to submit to the reduction, and to the "document" although they had offered to submit their rules and balance-sheet to the masters for their approval.* This relative prosperity only lasted a few years. One trade union organiser, however able and experienced, could not stop the course of economic evolution. The Society was locked out again and beaten in 1867, and in the summer of 1868 Burn was imprisoned for the debts of the union, which had gone bankrupt.† In the autumn of 1871, the attempt to organise the brickmakers had obviously failed. George Howell devoted himself to collecting a subscription for Burn, whom advancing age and his recent imprisonment had crippled. He was without any other resource, after forty years service in the movement.‡ Henceforward, organisation in brickmaking disappears. Brickmakers are swallowed up in the flood of general labourers, and the last trace of separate organisation is to be found in the title of the Amalgamated Society of Gasworkers, Brickworkers and General Labourers, a general labourers' union which formed part of the General Federation of Trade Unions at its foundation at the end of the century.

§ 5

One union was so small that it is difficult to say whether it was of new or old principles. Organisation in sawing had been killed by the introduction of machinery and for years the wood-cutting machinists remained

* *Beehive*, October, 29, '64 ; December 31, '64 ; February 4, '65 ; May 5, '66.

† O.S.M. *Returns*, June, 1868.

‡ *Beehive*, September 30, 1871.

unorganised. On March 10, 1866, some eighty machine sawyers met in Birmingham, under the influence of the great union revival and formed the "Birmingham and District Mill Sawyers and Planing Machine Workers' Trade Society." Other societies sprung up about this time in London and Manchester, and were absorbed later by the Birmingham union. Growth was very slow for many years : in 1872 there were only 180 members, and the society did not register or adopt a sick fund till 1877. In the next year, Joseph Wild, who had been secretary since the beginning, was forced to leave abruptly "for learning a non-society man the trade without being an apprentice." The society remained insignificant until the eighties : in so far as it could, it followed amalgamated methods, and its offspring, the present Amalgamated Society of Woodcutting Machinists, of course, was erected on principles of which Applegarth would have highly approved.*

§ 6

There was no dramatic conflict in Scotland, in the new unions which sprang up, between the new and old methods. The new methods penetrated rather by infiltration, and, indeed, were in some trades never adopted.

Organisation in Scotland had begun to revive from the great depression. After the collapse of 1842 there had been very little left except the Aberdeen local union,† that had broken away from the Scottish Operative Masons. Its history had been of little more than local interest. Letters to the employers stating that "the Jerneman masens wants their wadges reased," and their refusal or acceptance are all there is to record. The Society had, it is true, nominally three branches—

* Sawyers' Reports, 1873, 1877, 1878.

† This is the "Northern Union" mentioned earlier.

Aberdeen, Peterhead, Pitsligo—but each Lodge was utterly independent financially and their relations were little more than fraternal. The members regularly divided the surplus funds as a dividend, and there was no chance of their accumulating a sufficient fund to become a national union, had they so desired. Little, indeed, can be recorded of the Aberdeen movement, except the foundation (1846), as a result of a joiners' strike, of one of the earliest permanent Trades Councils, the Aberdeen "Delegated Committee of Sympathy." The Committee of Sympathy had a regular Constitution, Objects and Rules, with regular subscriptions. It lasted some three years.

The Aberdeen masons were able to drive out tasking, to prevent stone being worked at the quarries, and in 1850 to get a short Saturday. In 1868, however, they entered on a serious and prolonged struggle with the employers, which their resources were unable to stand. The union went bankrupt, the fight was lost, and in 1870 the society was dissolved.*

Its place was soon taken by a Lodge of the new reorganised Scottish United Operative Masons. As has been already mentioned in Chapter VI, the English Society sent in 1847 delegates from England to assist the remaining groups to revive their organisation. The task was uphill work, and it was not until June, 1854, that the Scottish society was able to issue its first *Return*. It had at that time ten lodges grouped mostly around Glasgow, and under a thousand members. As might be expected, the English delegates had given it a constitution and organisation exactly similar to that of their own society ; and down to the minutest detail, even to the arrangement of the *Return*, the methods of Richard

* Bowie.

Harnott were exactly copied. Lack of funds prevented, until September, 1855, the appointment of a full-time Central Corresponding Secretary, but at that date John M'Neill, a careful and conservative man, who had previously acted as half-time secretary, was appointed, at masons' current rates. Organisation, as in Harnott's area, was spread partly by the sending out of delegates, but mainly by the members' own exertions. The seat of government in theory was movable, but fortunately for the society remained fixed for a long period at Glasgow.

Although at the end of 1855 it had thirty-one lodges and some three thousand members, the Scottish United Operative Masons' Association (to give it its full title) was still so much of a local union that on the proposal of D. McLaren (afterwards Central Corresponding Secretary) it was agreed to join the " Central Trades Union " of Glasgow, a body which was in composition like a trades council, but which proposed to take over from the unions most of their trade activities. This, if it had been carried through, would have given Scottish Trades Unionism an entirely different character; instead of national unions based on craft or industry we should have had a federation or union of general unions based on locality. The difficulties, however, were far too great, and by the autumn of 1856 the masons and sawyers alone composed the " Central Trades Union," which was, therefore, dissolved.

M'Neill resigned at the end of 1855, and his successor was a far less competent man, R. Willox. The Society was largely left to run on the strength of its own lodges, and a central direction was absent. Worse than that, Willox announced in 1858 that he had lost £31 of the society's money, next year he borrowed his rent in advance, and finally shook the credit of the society by

disappearing with £17 in October, 1859. During this period the society had stood still in membership. That it had not decreased was largely due to the constitution, and to the methods adopted by M'Neill in the first years. Complaints had been made, as usual, by Lodges of the " inveterate malignity " of the Central Committee, which was " dragging from well-disposed Lodges the little freedom they have already gained " (Stirling*). No new points of policy were put forward by Willox : the years are blank : but the policy outlined previously was automatically carried out. Glasgow abolished tasking without even a strike. Funds were sufficiently regular for tramp relief, 6s. out-of-work (" idle") benefit, and £3 emigration bonus to be paid continuously over two summers. Organisation, as before, was based mainly on shop stewards, or " collectors," who acted as union representatives with each " squad " on a job.

Upon the Masons depended in Scotland the fate of the building trades as a whole. Scotland is built of stone. Until quite recently, masonry was practically the only building work done on any large scale, and masons have always vastly outnumbered bricklayers in Scotland. Masons do bricklayers' work, rather than the other way round, while the number of plasterers and slaters are very small. In Scotland, the general jobbing or operative builder in a small country district, who comes to the town, will almost always have been trained, if at all, as a mason. In England, he may call himself anything, but he will rarely be a mason. Further, there was not at this time any organisation in Scotland (except the carpenters') which could be compared in size to the masons'.

* S.O.M. *Returns*, October, 1858 For all this see S.O.M. *Returns*, 1854-1862.

Most important, therefore, was the fate of the nine-hour day movement in the hands of the masons. This was first seriously taken up in Edinburgh in September, 1860, after John Paton had succeeded to Willox as secretary. After prolonged negotiations the masters locked out both Edinburgh and Leith in January for demanding the nine-hours' day and (oddly enough) payment by the hour. Now, 1861 was the year of great prosperity and great increases in trade union membership. The masters had chosen their time badly, and had to give way altogether in May. The victory was the signal for the general formation of nine-hour committees all over Scotland. The country was covered carefully by Paton and his successor, James Hart (1862), and Lodge after Lodge was authorised, as the time seemed convenient, to strike for the nine hours. The short-time movement spread slowly but relentlessly over Scotland. It started in Edinburgh and spread into many of the up-country places before it reached Glasgow, which did not gain the nine hours until 1866. In that autumn the Society, whose seat of government was now Edinburgh, was able to hold a grand celebration of the "nine-hour day" victory and announce that, with trifling exceptions, it was universal in Scotland. The period of boom had been well used, for, in addition to the shortening of hours, the membership had risen to 6,606, and the number of lodges to 64.* Hart had not scrupled to increase the central authority after the manner that Harnott had done, and to rebuke disagreement with the views of the centre with the remark, "This is like the drivelling of imbeciles."†

* S.O.M. *Returns*, August, 1866.

† S.O.M. *Returns*, January, 1863.

All should have been well with the finances, but all was not. Hart might play at being Harnott, his real rôle was that of Thomas Shortt. He had been suspected of drunkenness as early as 1865, and suspended by the Central Committee. Violent conflicts ensued between him and the Committee, which complained of his "filthy language," but, on appeal to the membership, he was reinstated. Encouraged by this victory, he took to speculation, taking one sum after another, until, on a new committee being elected at the end of 1866, he had stolen £179. When he saw that his detection was certain, he cried, "The sooner I make a hole in the water the better," left the office and never came back.

His successor was D. McLaren, a man of unimpeachable honesty. He was unable to agree with the Central Committee, and found himself unequal to the amount of writing and clerical work: so, with unusual good sense, he resigned, though he felt that "if encouraged" he might "have become a better scholar." To him succeeded Matthew Allan (March, 1867), who became to the Scots society what Richard Harnott was to the English.

Matthew Allan (1825-1883) remained secretary of the society until his death, sixteen years later. Little is known of his early history. At one time he was working in London and acted as treasurer to a London Lodge. He was then holding a small sum of money when he went into a public-house one night, drank too much, and was robbed. From that time onwards he was a total abstainer. He was a man of firm character, great strength and considerable self-restraint, but above all direct and honest. He had few or no political opinions: like Harnott, he confined himself to the welfare of his trade and the defence of masons' interests generally, without

inquiring into the affairs of the working-class as a whole. He was neither for nor against Applegarth's new ideas : he ignored them. In person, he was large and imposing. He was tall, inclined to be stout, and his formidable appearance was increased by a magnificent forked beard.

He first comes into notice in the Scottish Masons' history as secretary to the Stirling "Nine-hours" Committee in 1861. Next year he ran for General Secretary, but out of five candidates he was fourth. In 1865 he had moved to Edinburgh and become secretary of the Edinburgh Lodge. He was elected to the Central Committee and took his part in suspending Hart, whose looseness and drunkenness gave him the gravest suspicions. In 1866 he was astonished by an attack from Harnott, who had observed his name in an old black-list of the English society, because of his London accident. Harnott consequently sent in a demand that Allan should be fined for fraud. Fortunately, Allan was able to prove that his name should have been erased long ago from the black-list, which was, indeed, no guide at all, and the Scottish society declared him acquitted. Harnott, however, who was now growing old and dictatorial, felt himself slighted in some way, and the relations between the societies were further chilled by Allan's election as Central Corresponding Secretary in 1867.

For several years he reaped the advantage of good trade and consequent increase in membership. In 1868 the membership rose to 8,291 in seventy-three lodges, and remained fairly steady till 1872, when it rose again to 9,444 in ninety-two lodges, and then steadily climbed with the great building boom until 1877, when the members numbered 13,759 in a hundred and sixteen

lodges—the highest number ever reached by the Society. Moreover, in that year Allan's businesslike methods had collected a reserve fund of over £18,000. The Society was a very different body from the Society which was thrown into great distress by the abstraction of £180 by James Hart.

In general, Allan's policy resembled Harnott's; in detail it differed. He gave the same careful attention to financial soundness, and it was owing to his representations that "idle" benefit was stopped. He did not, nor did his union, take up the same attitude towards payment by the hour. So far from opposing it, the Society even encouraged it. When Harnott, in 1870, was forced, much against his will, to apply for a loan of £1,000 from the Scots society, he was refused because the money would be used against "the hour-system, universal in Scotland." What is the reason of this is uncertain. An explanation may be found, possibly, in the custom of some Scotch employers of reckoning by the hour but only actually paying at the end of a fortnight. This made it far less common for a man to be told to stand off at the end of an hour, as happened often in England, and gave some sort of security.* It is also clear that rate-cutting on the hour system is much less to be feared when the workers have, as the Scottish masons had, a fixed nine-hour day.

But in his general policy—in the enforcement of a common policy, in clipping the power of the Lodges and forcing them to act together, unitedly and according to rule—Allan followed precisely Harnott's policy. The local autonomy of the Lodges had, in some places, brought the Society into a very bad way. Stirling and Dunblane Lodges had, indeed, come almost to blows

* See S O.M. *Returns*, April, 1872, Leitch case.

over a question of boundaries, and had been "poaching" members from each other as if they had been Lodges of hostile societies. This quarrel lasted nearly two years. Like Harnott, Allan stretched the existing constitution as far as it could go, and adapted it in practice to new circumstances as much as could be without reconstructing it on "amalgamated" principles. He settled the Stirling-Dunblane dispute by arbitration. He induced the Society to reject an Edinburgh proposal to follow up the nine-hour victory by an eight-hour fight. Under ordinary circumstances this would have been agreed to, and would almost certainly have led to disaster. His greatest victory was, perhaps, in September, 1874, when he laid his hands on the Glasgow Lodge, the "parent of the Society," had its finances inquired into and corrected, altered and brought back into conformity with the rules. It is quite certain that Glasgow would never have tolerated such disciplinary action from any previous secretary.

There was, of course, some resistance. Great opposition was made in 1870 to raising his wages from 30s. to £2 a week: six months' argle-bargling was required before it could be carried, and it was followed by a proposal, aimed at him, to make the C.C.S. not re-eligible, so that a change would be forced next year. This proposal was lost easily, and in 1872 Allan was re-elected without opposition. When, in 1878, a candidate was run against him he beat him by five to one. Wages —both real and nominal—were going steadily up, the nine hours had been retained and extended even to the most backward districts, and the Lodges as a whole were prepared to support the man with whose policy these benefits were associated. Time was to show that they were not exclusively of Allan's creation, but it is

certainly true that without him not nearly so much advantage would have been gained from the favourable circumstances.

Of other societies in Scotland there is little trace. No records remain of Plasterers' or Bricklayers' organisations in this period. Plumbers were organised in the English Society. Painters were organised, like labourers, in small trade clubs or not at all. All the direct records of the Associated Carpenters and Joiners have perished, but from other references some hints may be drawn of carpenters' organisation in Scotland.

Tradition states that the organisation of carpenters and joiners in the West of Scotland goes back beyond 1832. Alexander Campbell, the Glasgow joiner* who followed Robert Owen, and edited a number of short-lived Glasgow Labour papers, is believed to have been connected with it. For many years a banner which had belonged to the old society, was kept in the Associated's offices in Glasgow, but it was sent out for its last journey in a riotous procession in 1920, when it was destroyed or lost, after having passed through Reform and Chartist agitations unharmed. It is not certain, however, how far this society was a trade union ; there appear to have been some words on the banner suggesting that it was more a political club. However that may be, the society came to an end. The tradition is that it was dissolved in 1838 and the funds divided : a muddled statement in the Associated *Monthly Report* for March, 1895, gives the year as 1847. It is stated there that the " joiners in this part of the country " were in " amalgamation (with England) from 1832 to 1847," and that this is provable by " books still in our

* So Webb describes him. He calls himself "Wright and Glazier." (*Herald*, January, 1831.)

possession," but the whole statement is so confused and distorted by spite against the English society that it may well be the local tradition is correct.

A new union, the United Joiners of Glasgow and the West of Scotland, was founded in 1856,* again by Alexander Campbell, whose venerable portrait is on the sole remaining evidence of its existence, an old emblem. In 1861 this society was drawn into the growing tide of organisation and took a leading part in the formation of a new society called the Associated Carpenters' and Joiners' Society. This was originally a national society for Scotland, extended later, mainly by emigration, to England and Ireland. It started with only eleven lodges and 630 members—twelve more than the Amalgamated. It was not run particularly upon " amalgamated " lines by its first General Secretary, Matson, and was torn by internal dissensions.† In 1867, however, he resigned, and his place was taken by William Paterson, who had contested a seat for Parliament the year before as a Liberal. It appears—though this is not certain—that Paterson's administration brought with it a considerable approximation to " amalgamated " methods.‡ In 1873 the Society had 5,007 members in eighty-three Lodges.

The organisation of slaters in Scotland (there was no English organisation) also dates from the same period. We have already noted how, after 1834, slating as a trade suffered badly from invasions in England. In Scotland the same causes produced the reverse result : slaters

* Secretary, J. C. Proudfoot, who had previously been secretary to a local society. 1867 Committee, his evidence.

† A correspondent in the *Beehive* (July 2, 1864) says that Matson, in 1862, suggested amalgamation with the A.S.C.J. and received "cold and silent contempt." Such an offer was received, but its final fate is obscure. See Higgenbotham.

‡ *Beehive*, January 3, 1874.

invaded every other craft. A slater in Scotland was, and still is, a general repairer and will do almost anything. This is, of course, partly due to the fact that amalgamated principles and consequent craft jealousies never penetrated so far in Scotland as in England. Its effect was that the Amalgamated Slaters' Society of Scotland is a more important body—relatively—than the English society. A meeting was held in Glasgow on April 7, 1866, by delegates representing slaters of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Ayr, Paisley, Airdrie and Coatbridge, and Greenock, and the Amalgamated Slaters Society was launched on the First of May. It belied its name, having no " amalgamated " principles : its contributions were 4d. a week, and its benefits strike and funeral only. For many years it remained small and consequently inactive.*

§ 7

We have reserved till the last the consideration of the trade that offered the most resistance to the new ideas. The passage of time had not weakened the power or the obstinacy of Richard Harnott. The Operative Stonemasons' Union was still unquestionably the strongest building union, and no modification of its fighting policy can be traced. In the spring of 1858 the new federation of Master Builders had attempted to

* Cross. In the Preamble to the Rules, a document indeed old-fashioned, the founders made the following remarks, which might have been written for one of the societies described in Chapter i :—

"There cannot be an employment which is more calculated to give "greater pleasure to man, than to be bound together with the desire to "relieve the distress of their fellow workman, nor meetings of a more "elevating motive, than men laying their religious and political scruples to "one side and meeting together in common council with one purpose in "view, and that to raise their fellow tradesmen to a higher social position "in the cities, towns and villages of the country in which they have to "fight the battle of life."

introduce the hour system of payment in a number of selected northern towns—Sheffield, Halifax, Blackburn, Liverpool, Nottingham, Manchester, Huddersfield and Newcastle. The masons at once struck in every one of these towns and gained a complete victory within the month in every case, besides crippling the Federation.* Again, in the same *Return* that announced the close of the 1859-1860 London lock-out, Harnott noted casually that the masons acting alone had gained the nine-hours in most of the Lancashire towns without needing to strike.† In 1867 Newcastle was supported in a whole year's strike to get the nine-hours. In 1869, when a great effort was made to spread the hour-payment system over the whole country, the resistance was almost entirely directed by Harnott and confined to the masons. The only effort put out by the Junta was to send officially to Harnott a proposal that Lord Lichfield, A. J. Mundella, M.P., Tom Hughes, M.P., and others should arbitrate: Harnott at once refused, and the society levied itself half-a-day's wage for a prolonged fight. The masons were locked out over most of the North of England right through the year. In October the employers had been beaten in twenty-nine towns, but the important centres of Manchester and Liverpool held out. Harnott had to write in 1870 asking the Scottish Society for a loan, which it refused, and in the end the hour system was accepted in those two cities.‡ Nevertheless, it was at least a partial victory.

At no time did Harnott or his Committees consent to modify their attitude or to conceal it. A previous offer

* O.S.M. *Returns*, April—May, 1858.

† O.S.M. *Returns*, February, 1860.

‡ O.S.M. *Returns*, April, 1869, October, 1869, March, 1870.

by Mundella and Applegarth to arbitrate on a piecework dispute in 1868* had been snubbed as brusquely, while the evidence given by Harnott to the Royal Commission of 1867 distressed the Junta beyond words. Ignoring entirely their policy of concealing any restrictive or aggressive policy, he stated that under no circumstances would an unapprenticed man be allowed to do mason's work. He would forbid all piecework. Working below the rate was stopped at once. Overtime was forbidden. Rules existed against "chasing," or working faster than the average: those rules were, and would be, enforced.†

His authority over the union had increased enormously. He was able, if he so chose, to violate the rules with impunity. In 1867 it was decided to give him an Assistant Secretary. Among the candidates was a man named Atkins, who had been nominated by the greatest number of Lodges and in all probability would have won easily. Harnott, in gross disregard of the rules, sent out with the voting papers, and when there was no time for reply, a request to all members to vote against Atkins, whom he disliked and believed to be a person not attached sufficiently to the Society's welfare. By these means he put Atkins out. Violent objection was taken to this astonishing conduct: Harnott replied (backed by his Committee) that he had acted for the good of the society, and put the matter to the vote. As he had expected, his action was endorsed. Indeed, as he felt old age coming on, he was uneasy at the absolute dependence of the society upon him. In a new year's Address for 1870, he told the members that he feared that when he went the union would be

* *Beehive*, June 6, 1868.

† Q. 1060—1067, 1271

"convulsed." He suggested—in view of the financial strain of the employers' attack on weekly payment—that a general convention be held to consider policy as a whole and the means of defeating this attack. He even suggested that they might consent to the establishment of Courts of Conciliation, without powers, while forbidding any form of arbitration by an umpire, or any such device. The society again refused to take matters out of his hands: it refused to call a conference or interfere in any way. So Harnott went back to his old routine, holding everything in his own hands, using the Assistant Secretary, a mild man called Dyer, merely as a clerk, and even keeping the books on a private system that no one else could understand.

On February 7, 1872, the Central Committee and the society as a whole were alarmed and deeply distressed to hear that Harnott had died early in the morning. In spite of representations from the Committee concerning his health, he had retained all the work in his own hands, and till six o'clock the previous night had been working in the office. But at five in the morning "his wife awoke to find him lying dead in bed, his side contracted by paralysis." Very few members of the Society, probably, realised fully the loss that they had sustained, or how much the personal influence of Harnott and the modifications which he had silently made in the practice of the union had done to keep it prosperous when similar societies were in difficulties. But they all realised that a great man had passed away. Harnott "was as well known in trade circles as Mr. Gladstone is in the political world," said the *Manchester Times*, and the praise was not unjust. He had received presentations,

in his time, from as far away as Australia.* The Society showed its sense of its loss by giving to Harnott such a funeral as no other trade union leader had ever had before. A long procession of five hundred delegates of various trades followed him on foot to his grave in Salford cemetery : a band playing the DeadMarch in *Saul*, as though Harnott had, indeed, been a soldier, headed the cortège. His twenty-five years of service had left such an impression upon the rank and file that there was great competition for carving his headstone, and as if to delude themselves that he was still alive, the members forbade his signature to be removed from the certificate of entrance.† For years all new members found their entrance certified by a dead man's hand, while right throughout the life of the union the portrait of Richard Harnott remained upon the emblem.

* S.O.M. *Returns*, December, 1860 (a gold ring value £10). How the old world which he typified has vanished is shown by the fact that the Webbs do not even mention him in their history—do not seem to know of his existence.

† O.S.M. *Returns*, 1873, April.

CHAPTER XIII

APPLEGARTH'S VICTORY

PIECEWORK RESISTED * ITS IMPORTANCE * THE INTERNATIONAL * LEGAL DIFFICULTIES * THE FRANCHISE * THE ROYAL COMMISSION OF 1867 * POTTER'S FAILURE * SUCCESS OF THE AMALGAMATED TRADES * MUNDELLA * POTTER DEFEATED * "BEEHIVE" TAKEN OVER * ACTS OF 1871 * APPLEGARTH RESIGNS * CREMER CRUSHED

1866–1872

IT WOULD be a mistake to regard Applegarth's policy as a policy of complete non-resistance to the employers. The Junta policy was never that, though as exaggerated by its successors it seemed to resemble it very closely. On one or two points of policy its members put up as firm a resistance as Harnott might have done. It is true that they declined, on the whole, to fight payment by the hour, but on two other questions on the building trades Applegarth and Coulson made no concessions. These two were payment in kind—truck—of which practice they had a few cases to fight, and, far more important, the question of piecework. Applegarth fenced on this last at the 1867 Commission, but admitted in the end that local rules of his union forbade piecework. In fact, whether it was his own wish or the desire of his members, the whole strength of the Amalgamated Society, as of other building unions, was thrown against the introduction of piecework. Attempts to reintroduce it had been made fairly frequently ever since 1833 in various parts of the country. All unions had rules against it, and the

determination of the amalgamated unions to support them finally put an end to it. Payment by the piece had been the universal rule in the eighteenth century, and elaborate price-books (on which the current master builders' price-books are still based) were recognised. The carpenter, plasterer or bricklayer paid his own labourer by the time, but worked by the piece for the architect or the master carpenter in charge. This appears to have been dropped with the change in conditions brought about by the industrial revolution, but ever since the decline of the great building boom in the earlier part of the century spasmodic attempts had been made to reintroduce it.

Had they been successful, the effect upon the building trades would have been grave. The intention and effect of piecework is to increase the speed of labour. As was clearly shown during the war, payment by the amount of work done tempts each worker individually to force himself to work a little quicker for the increased pay that results. A high speed and high wages once attained, these are often followed by a cut in the payment rates. Whether this is done or not, the real injury has already been inflicted. The safeguards which the eight-hour day is meant to secure have been lost. Men are induced, as in America, to work at a speed above their normal powers over a long period of time: the operative pays the penalty in fatigue and inability to enjoy his leisure, in exhaustion, disease and early death, when his place is taken by younger men who are eaten up in the same manner. It is within the memory of living men that the speed of working has been lowered in the building trades. The operatives about 1860 were made to work at a rush speed.* Things are much easier now, and that is

* Potter, 7.

unquestionably due to the insistence on timework: with piecework the story would have been reversed.

A further result, possibly even more serious, would have followed. There is only one great industry in which piecework has been universally adopted over a long period of time—the cotton industry. What has the effect of this been upon the Unions? It was described in 1897 with great enthusiasm by Mr. and Mrs. Webb.* It results in a system of election of officials by examination. The need of a complicated knowledge of every detail of textile work, and the swift mathematical mind needed to calculate the effect of every recondite proposal on piecework rates upon the real standard wage, necessarily result in an examination for candidates, of which the following are specimen questions† :—

1. Find the number of stretches put up in a week and the price per 100 required to produce a gross wage of £3 9s. 7d. per pair of mules from the following particulars: Number of spindles in one mule, 1,090. From 56½ hours deduct 2¼ hours for cleaning and accidental stoppages and 1 hour for doffing. Speed of each mule, 4 stretches in 75 seconds.

4. Divide ·3364502 by ·001645.

5. Extract the square roots of 80's counts to three places of decimals, and then ascertain the required turns per inch for both twist and weft, the assumed standard being the square root of the counts, multiplied by $3\frac{1}{8}$ for weft and $3\frac{5}{8}$ for twist.

These questions assured (say the Webbs) the defeat of the "glibtongued popular leader," or, indeed, of any man who gained the confidence of his fellow-workers either for his fighting abilities or for any qualities other

* Webb, I.D. I. 196-200.

† Webb, I.D. I. 197.

than his knowledge of arithmetic. The assembly, as is natural, always confirmed the result of the examination. The result was that cotton officials were, in fact, selected by a system of examination such as for many hundreds of years was universal in China, and in agreement with the Sacred Empress Tsu Hsi, Mr. Webb regretted in 1897 that it was not more widely adopted.* But the Chinese method in England produced the same effects as in China—petrification of institutions and officials who are Mandarins. The officers of the Cotton unions were not decorated with the Peacock's Feather, but they formed, nevertheless, a caste utterly alien to the class it was supposed to represent and serve†. In consequence (though of course other causes have operated) the constitution and policy of the cotton unions have not varied in the last thirty years. They have become, from the most revolutionary, the most reactionary bodies. When other unions were slowly substituting Labour leaders for Liberals, their most prominent officer, James Mawdsley, was a Conservative politician. No movement for a forward policy or even for reconstruction of the details of union machinery has ever passed beyond the millgates in the textile trades. It might be argued that it is the extreme complexity of the cotton trade that allows of the growth of the official caste, which could not have taken root in building. The objection is absurd : there are as great possibilities of complication in building. Take the following two chance pages (41 and 42) from the Builders' Price Book of 1794 :—

* Webb, I.D. I. 198.

† Webb, I.D. I. 196 : "The bulk of the daily work of the trade union official in the cotton industry consists, in fact, in securing the uniform observance of a collective agreement, a service which, like that of a legal or medical professional man, could, with equal propriety, be rendered to either client." (Comments on the purchase of a cotton official by the employers.)

Joiners' Prices

DADO	£	s	d
At per foot ſuperficial			
¾ inch keyed dado, level, ſkirted and capped			4½
Ditto raking ſcribed to ſtairs			5½
Inch deal dovetailed dado and keyed 5d. or			6
Ditto raking ſcribed to ſteps of ſtairs 6d. to			7
Whole deal dovetailed dado and keyed			8
Ditto raking			9
Inch deal dado veneered with wainſcot			8
Common circular dado is generally valued at double price and the cylinder which it is glued upon charged extra but in general it ought to be valued according to the manner in which the workmanſhip is executed, viz:—			
Whole deal circular dado glued upon a cylinder, backed and wedged, including a plinth and torus, executed in a maſterly manner, true to the ſweep	2	9	
Ditto, deal circular raking dado to ſtairs, the plinth and torus all the way ſcribed down with the grain horizontal, the moulding of the torus to be two inches above the noſing of the ſteps and not filled in with guſſets, true to the ſweep	4	6	
WAINSCOTING			
Framed of ſquare work			
At per yard ſuperficial			
Inch Deal	2	9	
Ditto, dwarf	3	0	
Ditto, raking	3	4	
Whole deal	3	0	
Ditto, dwarf	3	4	
Ditto, raking	3	6	

	£	s	d
Inch and a half deal		3	4
Ditto, dwarf		3	8
Ditto, raking		4	0
Framed fluſh for hangings			
Inch deal		3	0
Whole deal		3	6
Inch and half deal		4	0
Framed fluſh for FRONTS TO CHIMNEYS			
At per foot of ſuperficial			
Inch deal with ſlit deal pannels		0	4½
Whole deal with ¾ deal pannels		0	5
Inch and a-half deal with inch deal pannels		0	6

Other sub-headings to Joiners' Work are: WORKING SLIT DEAL, THREE QUARTER DEAL, INCH DEAL, WHOLE OR INCH AND QUARTER DEAL, INCH AND HALF DEAL, TWO-INCH OR DOUBLE DEAL, TWO-INCH AND HALF DEAL, THREE INCH DEAL, SASH FRAMES AND SASHES, SASH FRAMES, INCH AND HALF SASHES, TWO INCH SASHES, BOXING AND HANGING STILES, BOXES FOR SASHES, OLD WAINSCOTING, PARTITIONS, CLOSET FRONTS, SPANDRELS TO STAIRS, OLD PARTITIONS, CHIMNEY FRONTS, FRAMED GROUNDS, NARROW GROUNDS, SOUNDING BOARDS, ROUGH BOARDING UNDER LEAD OR SLATES, BOARDED FLOORING, OLD FLOORING, BOARDING AND JOISTS TO FLOORS, LINING, SKIRTING, TORUS SKIRTING, PLAIN DOOR LININGS AND SOFFITES, THE SAME FRAMED, DOORS, TWO PANNELLED DOORS (seven varieties), SIX PANNELLED DOORS, EIGHT PANNELLED DOORS, TWO PANNELLED DOORS (six more kinds), SASHED DOORS (three kinds), GATES, OLD DOORS, RIGHT WAINSCOT DOORS—and so on for twice as much again, with an average of 30 entries under each Head.

The union official whose life was spent in calculating and fighting piecework rates upon such details would speedily have become as arid and isolated as any Cotton man. There was difficulty and straining enough before the erection of Applegarth could be modified to bring it into relation at all with modern conditions. Years of struggle, still uncompleted, were necessary for the industrial unionists when their time came. If Applegarth had, in addition, left behind a mandarin caste of officials, dynamite alone would have shifted them.

The avoidance of this lay to the credit of the new unions. But the main sphere of Applegarth's victories was not industrial, but Parliamentary and legal, or even wider. For Applegarth and the Junta undertook some activities which would not only have astonished the old trade unionists, but have been utterly beyond their comprehension. Among these was, unexpectedly enough, the foundation of the First International, about whose character there is still much misapprehension. The International was founded in 1864 as a result of the activities of Odger in calling an international meeting in London* to protest on behalf of the Polish revolutionaries massacred by the Russians. A Committee was appointed to consider further organisation, and it accepted a plan for an international organisation of workers, prepared by a foreign refugee, Dr. Karl Marx, with an Address by him explaining the principles of the new organisation, to which those present listened with interest if not with entire comprehension. Representatives of the new unionism completely controlled the new organisation. Odger, Howell and Applegarth were regularly upon the Council. The two latter, with Lucraft of the Chairmakers and Lawrence of the Amalgamated

* *International*, 17-20.

Tailors, put in some real work on behalf of the new body, although they always regarded the organisation of the whole European working class as no more than a side show. In the new General Council, on which Marx did not for some years play a predominant part, the building trades were heavily represented. The Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners had belonged from the beginning, and another early recruit was Coulson's union. Some curious whim of Harnott's brought the Operative Stonemasons in, and the Plasterers joined in 1867.* The first secretary was a member of Applegarth's union, W. R. Cremer, an uneasy and spiteful man, who picked a quarrel with the Council in 1866 and left, to the relief of all concerned : after him came Robert Shaw the painter, and he was followed by Peter Fox, another painter. The International, naturally, quarrelled with Potter when Applegarth did, and accused him of cheating on the bills : it was also used by the Junta as the instrument for running the rival to the *Beehive*, the *Workman's Advocate* already mentioned.

The intention of Applegarth in founding this new body was to extend the benefits of Trade Unionism to the Continent. "The original programme," said Howell truly, "a Gladstone or a Bright might have accepted with a good conscience."† There were no revolutionary aims and no one was more horrified than the Junta at the after-career of their offspring. Applegarth had all the usual Englishman's patronage of the foreigner—"we in England," he told the 1869 Conference at Basle, "have no need to creep into holes and corners lest a policeman should see us"‡—and his aim was to

* *International*, 111.

† *International*, 24.

‡ Humphrey, 104.

introduce to them the benefits of amalgamated principles, which would save them from the monotonous alternatives of oppression and revolution. The ordered progress of liberty, characteristic of British history, would be extended to Europe by means of innumerable replicas of the London Trades Council and the amalgamated unions.

The after history of the International must be given in a few words. From 1866 onwards it grew to be a power on the Continent. It was in general control of the large and growing trade union movement in France. It had an equally strong footing in Belgium and Switzerland, and began to reflect the Continental interest in political questions of a kind not provided for in the Gladstonian programme. At the very end of 1867, J. George Eccarius, a friend of Marx, was made secretary, and the interest of the Junta was diverted by the new attack on trade unions at home. Direction fell more and more into the hands of Marx. The International became huge in size, spreading to Holland, Denmark, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain and North America. An anarchist element, led by Bakunin, appeared and tried to dig the ground from under Marx' feet. British interest was failing; Applegarth, Odger and Lucraft were still nominally on the Council, but were very rarely seen at meetings. Then, after the Franco-Prussian war, came the uprising of the Commune of Paris in 1871, in which the International played a prominent part. The astonished Junta found itself sharing in, and, by the issue of Marx' *Civil War in France*, publicly approving an attempt by an armed working class to tear down its government. Odger and Lucraft at once resigned and repudiated the International: pressing personal preoccupations alone caused Applegarth to omit to do the same. The reformed

Beehive was set on to insulting the International, which replied by erecting a British "Labour Party" to harass the Liberal-Labour candidates approved by the Junta. However, the International, for practical purposes, broke up in 1872, and its Labour Party faded away soon after.*

Applegarth's main activities, fortunately for him, lay not in the International, but in the home field. His victories were soon mostly in the legal and Parliamentary field. We have before noticed the remarkable growth of legal persecution in the years from 1850 onwards. Harnott in 1868 sent round to his lodges a supplement dealing exclusively with cases at law in which the Stonemasons had been attacked. It was of foolscap size and nearly a third of an inch thick—the size of a considerable bluebook. There was no change in law, but the change in the application of the law had been immense. Wherever a conviction could be by any fiction sustained, the Bench lent itself gladly to the process. Sentences were increased, bullying grew worse, prosecutions more frequent. The government assisted by sending soldiers to break strikes† and did not consider the relief of cases of oppression. It might seem a contradiction that just at the time when the employers' attitude towards trade unions was growing milder, the attitude of the judiciary should be more severe. The fact was that this change in the behaviour of the magistrates was more a change of personnel than a change of policy. Historians are correct in pointing to the year 1832 as the year in which the industrial employers seized political control from the landowning class. The general control which they gained then was reinforced by the repeal of

* *International*, 71.

† Alliance, 1868, 1st Half-year.

the Corn Laws in 1846, in which the interests of the landlords were deliberately and gravely injured for the advantage of the industrial capitalists. Yet the effects of these victories were not felt immediately in every branch of the administration, and the process of infiltration nowhere took longer than in the magistracy. Magistrates had previously been drawn from the landed class, in whose minds anger at the workman forgetting his position was often modified by contempt for the employer preferring the complaint. Now such cases were more and more tried by men who were employers themselves, and naturally took a view hostile to the worker and in favour of their fellows. Marking this difference in 1871, W. P. Roberts, the lawyer, wrote :—

" Consider the generally acknowledged fact that of " late the tendency of circumstances has been to make " the Courts where the law is administered by magis- " trates, either at their own houses, or in their clerks' " offices, or at Petty Sessions or at Quarter Sessions, " more severe against working men than formerly pre- " vailed. As lately as thirty years ago [1841] the magis- " tracy was composed of more educated men than " now—of more solid social rank and wealth ; and " though many acts of cruelty were committed with their " sanction, still their conduct towards working men " frequently exhibited a sort of ' live and let live ' kind- " ness and sympathy. Of late years there has been a " change for the worse. The magistracy of the last few " years has been very much selected for political con- " siderations from the manufacturing and trading classes. " There was a *Derby* batch, for instance, and then as a " counterpoise there was a *Gladstone* batch. And it " has come to pass—no matter how—that a workman

" has to sustain a more keen and subtle application of " the law's discipline and correction—more severe and " artistical—than formerly."*

The judicial persecution of trade unionists fell under three main heads. To two of these we have already referred. It had firstly become the practice of magistrates to refuse to convict treasurers who absconded with trade union funds. The second general head was the treatment of picketing. Here the law had been thus summarised by the eminent Baron Bramwell :—

" The way in which a man shall dispose of his labour " or capital was a matter in which the public had an in- " terest and therefore if two or more persons sought by " coercion or compulsion of a man's mind and feelings, " by threats, intimidation or molestation to deter or in- " fluence him in the way in which he should employ his " industry or talents, they were guilty of a criminal " offence. That was the common law of the land and it " had been in his opinion re-enacted by a particular Act " of Parliament passed in the sixth year of the reign of " George IV. [1825]. . . . By a statute of 1859 it was " enacted that no workman, merely by reason of his " endeavouring peaceably and in a reasonable manner " and without threat or intimidation direct or indirect " to persuade others from working or ceasing to " work, should be guilty of an offence under the " former Act of Parliament. In other words the second " Act said that should not be so, if they did what " they did in a reasonable and peaceful manner for " the purposes of persuasion. . . . If picketing could " be done in a way that would excite no reasonable

* From *The Trade Union Bill*, 1871 : *A Letter from Mr. W. P. Roberts to Mr. George Potter* and others. Manchester Public Library.

" alarm, without molesting annoyance coercion or " compulsion, it would not be an offence in the eye of " the law."*

It was obvious that the effect of such a law was to leave enormous discretionary powers in the hands of the magistrates. " Indirect intimidation " might be held to apply to almost any form of persuasion : moreover, some of the more reactionary judges did not abide even by Baron Bramwell's ruling. Roberts attempted to induce the stonemasons to save themselves by adopting elaborately devious methods of striking against a scab or intimidating him. He told them not under any circumstances to act together, but one by one to approach the foreman and give notice of their leaving, offering no reasons. Any remarks or persuasion to be addressed to the scab should be done exclusively by a letter posted in a distant town by a friend not connected with the dispute. There is no evidence that this clumsy evasion was ever practised. The only thing that could be done was to alter the law.

The third instrument of abuse was the old Master and Servant Acts. Their provisions are thus described† :—

" If an employer broke a contract of service, even " wilfully and without excuse, he was liable only to be " sued for damages, or in the case of wages under £10 " to be summoned before a court of summary juris- " diction which could order payment of the amount due. " The workman, on the other hand, who wilfully broke " his contract of service, either by absenting himself " from his employment or by leaving his work, was " liable to be proceeded against for a criminal offence " and punished by three months imprisonment. This

* G.U. Monthly, August, 1867.

† Webb, 249.

" inequality was moreover aggravated by various " anomalies. It followed by the general law of evidence " that whilst a master sued by a servant could be witness " in his own favour, the servant prosecuted by his em- " ployer could not give evidence on his own behalf; " and it frequently happened that no other evidence than " the employer's could be produced. It was in the power " of a single justice of the peace, or on information on " oath, to issue a warrant for the summary arrest of the " workman, who thus found himself, when a dispute " occurred, suddenly seized, even in his bed, and haled " to prison at the discretion of a magistrate who was in " many cases himself an employer of labour. The case " was heard before a single justice of the peace, and the " hearing might take place at his private house. The " only punishment that could be inflicted was imprison- " ment, the law not allowing the alternative of a fine or " the payment of damages. From the decision of the " justice, however arbitrary, there was no appeal. " Finally, it must be added, the sentence of imprison- " ment was no discharge for a debt, so that a workman " was liable to be imprisoned over and over again for " the same breach of contract."

In desiring the reform of these laws by political action, both the Potter and Applegarth groups were agreed. Both men were Liberals, and their struggle here took the form of a competition to do the same things. The result of it was the signal failure of Potter and the signal success of Applegarth.

The first step was naturally the gain of the franchise by the town workers in 1867. No one believed that Potter's London Workingmen's Association had any serious share in this. The body responsible was the National Reform League, whose secretary was George

Howell and on whose Council, despite Potter's presence, the Junta and their middle class allies had control. The culmination of their agitation was the famous meeting in Hyde Park in July, 1866. This was forbidden by the police: nevertheless, the Council of the Reform League led the meeting to the Park and demanded admission. The police and soldiers refused and the crowd broke down the railings and poured in. Great efforts were made afterwards by Applegarth and others to prove that the crowd was absolutely passive, that the railings fell rather than were pushed,* but the rulers of the country thought otherwise, and this discreet display of force decided them to grant the concessions they had for some time been idly considering. The town workman, though not the miner or rural worker, was enfranchised in 1867.

In the same year Applegarth's political tactics had to become defensive: the trade union movement was faced with the most serious attack for years. The Royal Commission of 1867 represents the last and most formidable attempt by a section of the employers to return to the old system of suppression of trade unions. Among the most active towards this end were the master builders, and their defeat marks the end of that policy for half a century.†

The excuse for the appointment of the Commission was the discovery of the brickmakers' outrages in Manchester, already described, and of a series of even more serious acts of violence in Sheffield in connection with the steel trades. From these revelations sufficient feeling was worked up to make feasible an attempt to destroy trade unionism altogether. The Commission appointed

* See Humphrey, p. 60.

† See Webb, 265 onwards.

by Parliament to report consisted almost entirely of officials, presumed to be impartial. There was among them one friend of the Junta, Thomas Hughes, M.P., and through Trade Unionist agitation the further appointment of Frederic Harrison was secured. It was also permitted that certain Trade Unionists might attend, and Applegarth himself was present reporting back to the Junta, while Tom Connolly, president of the Stonemasons, attended and reported back to Potter. Hartwell, acting for Potter, called a general Trades Union Congress to meet the crisis and hear Connolly. As though to show there was to be no alliance or reconciliation, Applegarth described it as a fake conference, because it was called by the *Beehive* "the greatest enemy of the working-class inasmuch as it advocates and upholds strikes and endeavours to set masters against men."* The Junta formed a rival body, not merely to fight the Commission, but to draft and push a Bill containing the demands of Trade Unionists in general. This they called the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, representing the A.S.C.J., A.S.E., O.B.S., Ironfounders, and a small society of Vellum Binders, and it was in practically permanent session. Its superiority was obvious and swift. Connolly, Potter's man, soon got himself into trouble with the Commission, and was excluded for insulting behaviour. The Congress dissolved and was forgotten. But the Conference of Amalgamated Trades remained and engineered the evidence amazingly well. The Bill that it drafted was subjected to a violent attack in the *Beehive*, but without result.† By the end of the year, the whole direction of the Parliamentary campaign was clearly in Applegarth's

* *Beehive*, March 18, 1867.

† *Beehive*, July 27, December 14, 1867.

hands: Potter was helpless. The credit of the victory went entirely to the Junta. The number of supporters of the Conference of Amalgamated Trades rose from 70,000 to 200,000.*

The ascendancy of the Junta was emphasised also by the manner of the victory. The witness stand was mainly occupied by the leaders of the new policy—William Allan, Coulson, Howell and Applegarth himself, who was examined three times. They succeeded in impressing not merely upon the Commission, but upon the world at large that they represented an entirely new form of trade unionism, more efficient, economical, and, above all, pacific. They showed that they had no connection with the brickmakers' or the Sheffield outrages, but stood for peace and good feeling between masters and men. On the other hand the representatives of the old unions, including Potter himself, made a very poor show. Although they believed that happily they were "acquitted of all practices of an objectionable nature"† —as, indeed, they should have been—they nevertheless left under a cloud. None, except Harnott, attempted to put up any rival policy for trade unionism: they all, with transparent dishonesty, tried to assimilate their societies to the Amalgamated unions. A convenient forgetfulness and vagueness possessed them, in reply to questions on strikes against non-unionists and such matters. Worse than all was the way in which MacDonald (Alliance Painters), Last (G.U.) and Houseley (Manchester Order) were forced to admit that they really knew very little about their unions, and that it was impossible to say where they stood. Chaos and disorder in administration were plainly indicated. As a

* *Beehive*, August 8, 1868.
† G.U. Annual, 1867-8.

result of the long and closely followed inquiry the new Amalgamated unions were widely advertised as efficient, peaceful, respectable, and directed by a considered policy : the old unions branded as incompetent, without a policy, chaotic and possibly even connected with the violence and murders that had shocked everyone. It is not mere coincidence that next year the membership figures for the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners passed for the first time those of the General Union and began a superiority that was never lost.

The section of employers that desired repressive legislation was badly checked by the evidence of the amalgamated trades, and shifted its ground of attack. It brought up actuaries of considerable reputation to prove that the societies were financially unsound : that they could not over a period of time pay the benefits promised from the subscriptions demanded. The experts neglected, as Applegarth pointed out, the fact that any society could, unlike an insurance company, raise a levy or increase subscriptions whenever it chose. In any case, the change of tactics by the employers was equivalent to a defeat of their hopes for repressive legislation. Instead of discussing whether Trade Unions should be suppressed in the interests of society, the Commission found itself discussing whether the internal financial arrangements of the A.S.C.J. could be improved. Eventually the Commission issued two reports : the Minority Report, drafted by Harrison, was frankly a report from the point of view of the trade unionists, relieving them of all the disabilities mentioned above and imposing no restrictions : the Majority Report imposed some small but irritating conditions for a less measure of relief. Either of these represented a complete defeat for the employers. Applegarth,

moreover, felt now sufficiently strong to use threats—if empty threats—against even the small annoyances of the Majority Report. "If Parliament," he wrote, "should agree with the Majority . . . then it is clear that those of our number whose labours for years have been directed towards elevating the tone and policy of Trade Unions would have no inducement to continue our efforts in that direction."* The Government took no action upon the Commission's Reports, or at all, for four years. The offensive had been defeated, by the Junta's efforts exclusively. Next year, moreover, a friend of the Junta, W. Russell Gurney, the Recorder, slipped through Parliament the "Recorder's Act," which made defaulting officials of trade unions liable to punishment, without referring to trade unions directly or indirectly. So general was the misconception of the Act that the treasurer of Shoreditch Lodge of the Operative Bricklayers (London Order) appropriated £30 in 1868, assuming himself to be quite safe. He was tracked down after careful search by Coulson, and prosecuted under the Recorder's Act, and the presiding judge was so uncertain that he called in the Recorder himself to advise him whether the Act did in fact apply.†

The predominance of Applegarth and the eclipse of Potter was further emphasised the same year by the election of A. J. Mundella for Sheffield. Mundella, a Liberal, was selected by the trade unions of Sheffield for candidate, and ran under the auspices of the trades. Applegarth was largely responsible, not merely for his selection, but for his return as well. His candidature for Sheffield—the centre of the outrages—was a defiance to

* Humphrey, p. 167.

† Ruffell. The nine-months' sentence that followed widely advertised the Act.

the " die-hard " group of employers : Applegarth made it clear also that it was a repudiation of the Potter group. "Who is the candidate the Sheffield workers have selected ? " he wrote during the election.* " Is he a firebrand from among their own ranks, a blind advocate of their interests regardless of the interests of others? No, he is an employer of labour who . . . has substituted for an almost chronic state of social warfare a system of evenhanded justice. . . . The system of arbitration, of which he has been champion, to the employers means a feeling of confidence and certainty when contracting for work, a spirit of give and take when bargaining for labour."

Meanwhile, George Potter was involved in worse and worse difficulties. The army which he led was an army of disorder. It was only bound together by a dislike of the mental effort demanded by the new amalgamations, by a preference for local independence and no central authority. It was difficult to keep together a following whose rallying cry was disunion, and whose bond of unity was complete isolation. Harnott occasionally recommended the *Beehive* to his members, but of permanent support from the older unions he had very little. He could work up, for the moment, a great storm of indignation, and rouse the London trades for some particular object, but in a month the agitation had disappeared. It vanished like wind, but the amalgamated unions remained and grew silently in power every day. The *Beehive* was as helpless against them as the sea against rocks. Potter had lost his position as leader of the London building trades. He had lost his prestige throughout the country. Then, in 1868, the circulation of the *Beehive* began to fall seriously, and he found himself

* Humphrey, 66

in money difficulties. He made attempts to get a reconciliation. By a common device, he combined threats with advances. He called together (Manchester, 1868) the first Trades Union Congress that is recognised as the beginning of a long series, which was not attended by any of the new unions in the building trade. He thus provided himself, as he hoped, with a counterweight to the London Trades Council. At the same time he had inserted in the *Beehive* an article remarking how obviously Mr. Robert Applegarth, among others, was marked out as a useful M.P., and he praised the finance of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners. He even went so far as to recant altogether his opposition to the Junta's bill legalising trade unions, and got himself and Hartwell placed on a committee to support it.*

These overtures did not save him. In 1869 he was struggling into deeper and deeper water—the *Beehive* was in very real danger of ceasing altogether. He made the 1869 Trades Union Congress appoint a "Parliamentary Committee," which was intended as a rival to the Junta,† but it was a helpless futile body, and was no sooner appointed than it could be seen to be negligible. So, some time during the year—it is not clear when—Potter threw up the sponge and came to the Junta for assistance in running the *Beehive*.

Applegarth and his fellows were not the men to allow a victory like this to pass without extracting the full value from it. A complete reorganisation of the paper was arranged, to come into force upon January 1, 1870. Coulson, Odger and Applegarth, Potter's personal enemies, were placed upon the directing committee. Potter was saddled with a superior editor, the Reverend

* *Beehive*, July 4, 25, October 17, 1868

† Davis I. 6.

Henry Solly, advocate of Working-men's Clubs, who was felt to be the right man to see that the Junta's policy was properly expounded. The paper was reduced from 2d. to 1d., and its format, to mark the break, was entirely altered. Previously it had been a paper in which police news, divorces, murders, indecent assaults and foreign massacres took a large place and assured it (as with our present Sunday papers) a considerable genuine proletarian circulation. Together with these were general news items, accounts of trade disputes and vigorous if irresponsible leaders urging a fighting policy. This was all changed. Murders and divorces, not being elevating, were removed, and their place taken by items of various information, dealing largely with the customs of foreign countries. The space devoted to leaders, and disguised lectures, was increased enormously. Addresses, articles and lectures by the middle class friends of the Junta, upon the present condition of the law, on foreign trade, on the proper policy of trade unions, and on all the points of the Liberal Party programme, took the place of the old fighting editorials. "Trade news" declined into scrappy information about local dinners, presentation of superannuation donations, and all the trifling scraps of news that drift into trade union offices. In politics respectability was carried to the extreme. Employers were very rarely attacked, but "atrocities by trade unionists" were published and condemned—worse, the Government was even once asked, "Is it not high time that serious notice was taken of these abominable outrages?"* We are not surprised to find that the Prince of Wales was sycophantically praised, and, in spite of some able and clear-headed articles by Beesly, that the Paris Commune was abused in the usual

* *Beehive*, July 8, 1871.

journalists' fashion. Potter was soon absolutely broken. It was felt no longer necessary to keep Solly to watch him, and he was restored as editor, where he faithfully followed the new policy, restricting his own contributions to such subjects as "The Advantages of Attending Religious Services." He was allowed to retain the secretaryship of the Trades Union Congress till its next meeting in 1871, when it was given to his slanderer Odger. It would, of course, be absurd to regard Potter as a clear-headed revolutionary defeated by his enemies: nevertheless, the Junta did undoubtedly use this broken man for purposes that, if at all honest, he must have thought contemptible, and the later numbers of the *Beehive* are not pleasant to read. He carried on at his job till the paper vanished in the storm of 1878. Afterwards he tried other ventures in journalism, and in the end drank himself to death in 1893.*

Very soon after the fall of Potter, in 1871, the Junta scored a further political victory, which represented as great a political advance as was possible at the moment. Bruce, the Home Secretary, introduced and carried a bill which granted, on two main heads, all the demands of the trade unionists. It was explicitly declared that no union could be declared illegal for being "in restraint of trade." Registration was to be open to all, and funds thus protected. No interference in unions' internal affairs was allowed for, while they were given the unusual privilege of not being prosecutable in a court of law. But, beside this Act (originally, within this Act), he carried a further Act which recapitulated the various decisions on picketing and coercion that had made trade union action so difficult. It did not introduce any new offences, but merely by codifying and clarifying the existing

* See the *Plebs*, February, 1923.

prohibitions made the law somewhat more oppressive. It gravely hampered the engineers in their nine-hours strike on the North-East coast the same year. Edward Miller, the Newcastle secretary, wrote to Mossman of the "Running Horse": "Had it not been for the trades Union Bill there would not have been a man in any of these shops I Beleeve. it greatly Stops our picketting, we have got several Mounted policemen to watch the engineers and the men on strike."*

Nevertheless, for the moment the passage of the new Bill was a victory for the Junta and its allies. The defeat of Potter had removed any possible rival to them in trade unionism as a whole. The death of Harnott in 1872 was soon to remove the last outstanding representative of the old ideas in the separate unions. And even before this Applegarth had come to regard the main fabric of his work as complete. The death of his wife about this time may have had something to do with his decision, but at the beginning of 1871 he was undoubtedly considering leaving his post for more remunerative work. His task was for the moment completed: the ideas for which he stood had clearly conquered, and he might attend to his personal advantage. Before he could do so, an unexpected, purely personal and irrelevant crisis intervened. He had been appointed, to the delight of his Executive, a member of a Royal Commission on Contagious Diseases (venereal diseases) in 1870. This was taken as an honour by all but a small group of London men, headed by Cremer, who were personally jealous of Applegarth. These went round the London lodges intriguing against Applegarth, declaring that he was wasting the time of the Society in investigating obscenities. Their complaints

* A.S.W various.

actually brought the Executive (a body elected by the London lodges alone) to vote that Applegarth should not attend Commission sittings during the day—a decision ignored and quickly withdrawn. But in April, 1871, the Executive had to be renewed and Cremer and his little pack of intriguers secured election. They at once ordered Applegarth off the Commission, and mean-mindedly accepted the report of their Finance Committee, "a paltry and humiliating document."* Applegarth instantly resigned his general secretaryship.

But this resignation, and the dignified and telling letter that accompanied it, were for public consumption only. Applegarth had no intention of leaving the affairs of his society in the hands of people like Cremer's followers, and he did not, in fact, abandon his post till he was satisfied that they were utterly beaten. He played the precise inverse of the trick Coulson used against Markley. He wrote round to all the members of the General Council (representing, it will be remembered, the whole society and when properly called together, the supreme authority) recounting the events from his point of view, pointing out that "in the rules there is no provision whatever as to who shall call the G.C. together," and telling them that if they did not wish him to hand over the property and control of the Society to the E.C., they were to meet on May 18 in the London office. This was flagrantly unconstitutional: a deposed or resigned secretary had no right himself to call a General Council to reinstate him. But Applegarth judged correctly the good sense of the General Council and the members as a whole. The General Council turned up on the date, reversed the decision of the E.C. and, upon

* Higgenbotham

the latter declaring itself the real authority, expelled it *en bloc*. Cremer and his group tried to run a rival society: they stole the books and claimed the name. But proceedings before the Registrar, followed by arbitration, secured the name, while legal action stopped them touching the funds. As soon as the facts were known no more than 1,300 members out of 11,236 supported Cremer. To prevent any such coup recurring, the headquarters were removed to Manchester, and a close friend and follower of Applegarth's, J. D. Prior, appointed General Secretary. Seeing that the victory was won, then, and not till then, did Applegarth finally leave the office. Cremer's society had vanished by 1874: most branches rejoined the A.S.C.J.: Cremer himself followed his own advancement and became "Sir Randal Cremer, M.P., first working man Knight."*

* Chandler, 36-67; Higgenbotham; Humphrey, ch. xi. For Cremer, see Howard Evans, *Sir Randal Cremer*. He was in favour of international peace and of the subjection of women, but the rest of his political ideas seem to have been vague. His real influence was small.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST STRUGGLES OF THE OLD UNIONS

NINE HOURS AGAIN * MASONS BREAK AWAY * NEW UNIONS: LABOURERS AND AMALGAMATED PAINTERS * COULSON'S "UNITY" PLAN * APPLEGARTH'S SUCCESSORS * DISASTER IN 1877 * STONEMASONS CRASH * CONSTITUTION CHANGED * MEMBERS DISHEARTENED * CONDITION OF GENERAL UNION OF CARPENTERS * PRIOR DECLARES WAR ON IT * AMALGAMATED VICTORY * BRICKLAYERS' CONFLICT * MANCHESTER ALLIANCE BECOMES "AMALGAMATED" * SLATERS ALSO * PLASTERERS' DIFFICULTIES * WILLIAMS' ERROR * CHANGE IN CONSTITUTION * VIOLENT QUARRELS * CHERRY PLUMBERS' SECRETARY * GREAT CONSERVATISM * SCOTTISH BREAKAWAY * REGISTRATION MOVEMENT * THE DISASTER IN SCOTLAND * FAILURE OF THE CITY OF GLASGOW BANK * PLASTERERS * SLATERS * STONEMASONS * ALLAN'S DEATH *

DECLINE OF THE UNION

1872–1885

TO Applegarth an Applegarth succeeds. From 1862 onwards the policy of the A.S.C.J. is continuous, might almost be operated by the same man. The line of Applegarth is continued right down until the resignation of Francis Chandler a year or two ago. The methods, policy, thought and detail organisation of Applegarth impressed themselves deeply upon J. D. Prior, J. S. Murchie, and Francis Chandler. There is, indeed, a tradition of Murchie (secretary 1881-1887) as a brilliant young man whom death cut short before he could make far-reaching changes. But he held his office six years before he died, and he made no change of

importance. For practical purposes, the tradition of Applegarth was unbroken for nearly sixty years. In other building unions the victory of the new principles was never so complete, and their decay began earlier. But during the decade after Applegarth's resignation, their progress was unchecked. At the beginning of the seventies the unions representing the new ideas had attained a position of superiority, and the policy of the Junta was unquestioningly deferred to in matters affecting trade unionism as a whole. In the eighties the unions on the old principles have either remodelled themselves upon the new, or have been battered into insignificance. Some changed their whole internal constitution : those that did not were attacked by their more powerful amalgamated rivals and reduced to obscurity and impotence. In the larger Trade Union world, moreover, the power of the successors to the Junta became more organised and dictatorial : they were able for a while to turn the Trades Union Congress into little more than an appendage of the political party they favoured.

This victory was won by no compromise or conciliation. The man who succeeded to Applegarth's place, John D. Prior,* was, if anything, more rigid than Applegarth himself. He intensified the least pleasant aspects of his policy. He played Rehoboam to Applegarth's Solomon. Trade action of any kind virtually ceased; what energy was shown was in fighting other unions and other crafts. " We find during these years no attempt by headquarters to level up the wages of low-paid districts or to grapple with the problems of overtime or piecework. We watch, on the contrary, the branches defending themselves before the Executive for their little spurts of local activity, and pleading, in order

* Born Bradford (Devon), 1840. See *Beehive*, October 11, 1873.

to wring from a reluctant treasury the concession of strike pay, that they have been dragged into the 'Advance Movement' by the more aggressive policy of the General Union (the rival trade society of the old type) or by irresponsible 'strike committees' of non-society men."*

The seventies were opened in the building trades by a fresh "nine hours" movement, the last struggle of the old fighting spirit, which recalled in many ways the great struggle of 1860. It was not confined to the building industry, it arose directly from the rank and file strike for nine hours in the engineering industry in 1871, into which the A.S.E. was dragged much against its will. Attempts to revive the nine-hours cry had been made in the building industry in 1870,† but not until after the engineering movement did it join in seriously. In January, 1872, the London lodges of the masons and the local London carpenters' and joiners' societies united together to get "nine and nine"—ninepence an hour and a recognised day of nine hours. The demand was first presented by the masons and rejected, then by the carpenters and rejected, then by both together and rejected. The carpenters replied by striking two London shops (Jackson & Shaw and Brass), and the employers again answered by a general lock-out of all trades.‡ Some 5,000 men, not more, were affected.

An "Amalgamated Building Trades Committee" was formed, on the model of 1859, but all the known leaders of the Carpenters and Joiners were excluded, in order not to offend either Applegarth or Cremer. The result was that Potter's place as leader was more or less

* Webb, 319.

† *Beehive*, March 5, 1870

‡ *Beehive*, January 6, February 3, March 9, March 16, May 4, 18, 31, June 7, 1872.

occupied by a General Union member, Charles Matkin. All the same, the Amalgamated supported its locked-out members and even some others, sourly remarking that "the carpenters and joiners believe strikes and lock-outs are evils and . . . trust that courts of conciliation may supersede them." Coulson also disliked the new movement, but his hands were forced by his members, particularly Charlie Shearman, a very energetic and popular member of the Poplar branch. Coulson attended the committee, but withdrew upon the pretext that the other members had not sufficient powers. The Committee was thus left with only its weakest members. The masons, whose representatives were Grey, the veteran of 1859, and a young man called Henry Broadhurst, only attended one meeting. The carpenters did not include "amalgamated" representatives. The plasterers represented independent societies and the Metropolitan Association, as the National Association did not extend to London. The painters were entirely without central organisation, while the smiths and labourers represented unions formed during the lock-out. Weak though they were, however, they rejected an impudent "arbitration" proposal by the employers—the arbitrators were two Tory peers and the operatives were to go back on the old terms pending a decision. Their action was scandalously abused in the *Beehive*, but the Committee's chances were really very fair.*

They were ruined by the masons. Harnott was only just dead and the Operative Stonemasons were still unquestionedly the strongest and most independent of the

* No plumbers attended the Committee. See O.B.S. Monthly, July, August, 1872; Balance Sheet of the Short Time Movement, 1872 (A.S.W. various), and *Beehive*, June 14, 21, 28, July 6, 1872.

building unions. The masons had for too long been accustomed to regard the other trades as inferiors who came to them for advice and assistance. They did not or would not realise that obligations might be required of them by these very trades in such a case as this. Broadhurst, impregnated though he was with Applegarth's ideas, had recognised this as one of the Rules Revision Committee in 1871 : " we are actually estranging and isolating ourselves from every trade society in the kingdom," he wrote.* The effect of this isolation was now felt. Broadhurst and the London Lodges had made the most explicit promises to the carpenters and the others, but they now found their Central Committee was not prepared to support them. As in 1860, they thought of themselves alone, opened negotiations privately with the employers, and went back in July at 8½d. an hour. The trade unionist opinion of London was scandalised : the Committee openly announced that the masons had " sold " the movement, and even Applegarth wrote to Broadhurst asking for an explanation. Broadhurst answered him with a cynical parody of his own views, saying that the masons had gone back because it was their duty as well-paid craftsmen to " lend a helping hand to the worse paid, by accepting a reasonable offer." To the society itself, he reported lordlily : " We think it almost unnecessary to refer to the hubbub made by the other trades of London. We came to terms without consulting them."† The Committee fairly soon broke up, but the carpenters and bricklayers carried on until August 31, when they

* O.S.M. *Returns*, September, 1871.

† *Beehive*, July 13, 27, 1872. He had promised the other trades the masons would "stand shoulder to shoulder" with them. O.S.M. *Returns*, July, 1872.

accepted 8½d. and a complicated system of hours which worked out over the year at a little more than nine—terms which were a trifle better than the masons'.

As from the great struggle of 1859, so from the lesser conflict of 1872 there sprang up some new unions. The first was the General Amalgamated Labourers' Union, an attempt by Patrick Kenney, an Irish labourer, to apply amalgamated principles to builders' labourers. Applegarth himself gave them his assistance, checked their accounts and regulated their system of finance. It gained, as a result of the lock-out (which secured labourers a ½d. rise to 5½d. an hour), 20 lodges with 5,000 members.* But "amalgamated principles" were not well adapted to low-paid labourers. In 1873, when the funds were centralised, some fourteen lodges refused to hand them in, and Court proceedings only recovered a portion.† The Union began to decline, and Kenney himself, an unreliable person, fell into bad hands. He became an agent of the Conservative Party, and, with a colleague named Kelly, was sent to the 1881 Trades Union Congress as head of the "Fair Trade" group, nominally as his Union's delegate (he returned 2,000 members). The attack there led by the Conservatives fell miserably to pieces. Kenney, whose union was now only a shadow, was prominent for a while longer as a "Conservative working man," but in 1888 was inveigled into the Holborn Restaurant, where a dinner was being given to the International Trades Union Congress. Here he took too much drink and was found with some stolen spoons, for which he was sentenced to

* Kenney.

† Pamphlet in Burns, Various.

fifteen months hard labour.* This was the end of the first and last attempt to apply amalgamated principles to builders' labourers.

There was still one branch of the building trades in London where amalgamated principles had not yet succeeded. After 1872 George Shipton made yet another attempt to reorganise the London Painters. The old society was dead in all but name, but he used its name to start a fresh "Amalgamated Society of House Decorators and Painters." This body, which was at last destined to live, began its career in January, 1873, with 341 members in eight branches, five of which were in London.† Shipton had learnt something from his previous failures: he dropped the absolute pacifism of earlier days. Branches were allowed to strike against an invasion of recognised privileges and in its first year the union fought a considerable strike for the right to exist. Out of work, or "Winter," benefit was now optional, and if a man was paying to a Friendly Society (but only then) he might join as "trade only" with no benefits at all. For the rest, the constitution was like other amalgamated unions—a local Executive Council subject to a General Council representing the whole society. No public-house keeper could hold any office in the branch or society. It progressed steadily, but dismally slowly: it had in 1876 only 663 members in 19 branches.

* Kelly's end was darker still—he took to organising scabs and ran at the end of the nineties up till 1902 a "Free Labour Association," when he died (B.L., August, 1902). For Kenney, see Trial in A.S.W. various, Davis, Broadhurst, Haggerty. It should be noted that Kenney had deeply offended Howell and others of the Broadhurst group, and from evidence put before Mr. Haggerty, soon after the event, he was satisfied that the whole affair was a frame-up and the spoons deliberately "planted" on Kenney when he was incapable. The union maintained a faint existence with a score or two of members.

† The others were Swansea, Southampton, Waterford.

The general history of the building trades from 1870 to 1880 is barren. There is but one event affecting every trade that is of importance. It arises from an attempt by one of the most prominent Junta members to minimise the evil effects of his own system. The growth of strong craft unions was leading to more and more craft conflicts. In 1877 we find a Hanley plumbers' strike scabbed by painter-plumbers belonging to the Alliance.* In 1875 and '76 the Manchester Order of Bricklayers was continually striking against plasterers, masons and labourers touching various kinds of work that it claimed.† From 1877 onwards Coulson's union made a fierce attack on the plasterers' and masons' organisations in order to drive anybody but bricklayers off terra-cotta work : the struggle went on for ten years and was only then abandoned because the plasterers were too strong.‡ Such incidents led Coulson, whose mind was not petrified by the narrowest craft antagonism, to propose an excellent, far-reaching scheme for a federal organisation of the building trades. A Conference was called by him in 1878 and consultations were carried on steadily until early in 1880 a scheme was drafted for the "National Unity of Building Trades Association." It was to be a Federation of considerable powers : indeed, it resembled very much an industrial union (without the labourers) with trade benefits only. It was, however, something of a family party, and the old-fashioned unions were ignored. The only bodies represented were the London Order of Bricklayers, the A.S.C.J., the London painters, and the Plasterers : the conferences in effect consisted of Coulson, Prior, Williams and

* O.P.Q.R., December, 1877.

† Unity Reports, 1875-76.

‡ O.B.S. Annuals, 1877, 1887.

Shipton. The scheme was sent out for the approval of members: the Bricklayers voted in favour by a large majority, the Plasterers and London Painters also approved, but the carpenters and joiners, in whose ranks narrow craft spirit was already strong, defeated it by a small majority. Without them it was hardly worth going on with: it was first "deferred" and then forgotten, and the way left clear for the full development of bitter sectional quarrels.*

The Junta had been dissolved by the resignation of Applegarth and the death of Allan. Although in Henry Broadhurst of the Stonemasons, John Burnett of the Engineers, John Prior of the A.S.C.J. and George Shipton of the London Painters we may trace a clique which carried on its work, and in which the building trades had a predominance, it was not nearly so closely-knit a group, and the members did not even all reside in one city. Their field of action was the Trades Union Congress, not the London Trades Council. They were, moreover, less and less trade unionists seeking a definite reform and more and more professional politicians making recruits for the Liberal Party. Their first and last assertion of independence came in 1874, on the resignation of Mr. Gladstone. Previously, their activities had been restricted to inducing, where possible, Liberal associations to adopt working-man candidates pushed by the "Labour Representation League," a now defunct institution of no defined political programme. But the attitude of Mr. Gladstone drove them further. His Government not merely refused to repeal the offensive Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1871, but sanctioned the most oppressive proceedings under it, as

* O.B.S. Annual 1880, Various, L.P. Annual 1880, Plast. Monthly, August, 1880, Higgenbotham.

for example the conviction of the gasworkers who struck in 1872, and for whom all Broadhurst's activity was in vain. In consequence, Prior and the other leaders took in the 1874 election the painful step of advising their members to vote for Conservatives, and of running independent labour candidates, of whom two (Burt and MacDonald) were elected. Whether through their activities or not, Mr. Gladstone was badly beaten, and upon all sides the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress received the honour due to political strategists of the first class. The Conservative Government hastened to fulfil its share of the bargain by virtually repealing the offensive laws in 1875 and '76. The Liberal Party never made the same mistake again, and thenceforward assiduously courted the Trade Union leaders. The very completeness of this victory, however, closed the career of Broadhurst and his adherents as political innovators. They had secured all they desired, which was the legalisation of unions, and further laws in protection of the workers they opposed. Their programme for the next ten years consisted of trifling amendments to the existing laws, adopted usually only in so far as and when they had been approved by the Liberal Party. More, as has well been pointed out, was done for the protection of the worker by the one man Charles Bradlaugh than the whole Parliamentary Committee and all its M.P.s.*

Soon, moreover, the attention of the building trade operatives was diverted by domestic calamity. The building trade always feels last of all trades either a depression or a revival, and the general depression that began in 1875 did not have its full effect here until 1878. When it came, the disaster, which made such profound alterations in building trades unionism, struck first,

* Webb, p. 363

indeed seemed almost to be provoked by, the premier union in the trade. The masons had still a membership double or treble that of an ordinary building union. The death of Harnott in 1872 had been compensated for the moment by the happy accident that made the seat of government from 1873 to 1876 London, where the changing Central Committees were under the permanent influence of Broadhurst. But there were not lacking signs of weakness. Dyer, Harnott's successor, was oppressed by his own inefficiency and the effects of Harnott's dictatorial manner. He had no energy or initiative, and the lodges held him in little respect. Finance became loose and in 1874 gross frauds by the Manchester Lodge over a long period were discovered. Strike pay had been drawn on a large scale for non-existent members. More, in these years, the last traces of weekly payment were permitted to vanish, and the hourly system became universal. In 1876 the seat of government had to be moved, and the members selected Cardiff, a town isolated from the rest of England. Now the Committee no more than the secretary commanded the respect of the society. Hell broke loose. The *Returns* once more became filled, as in Shortt's days, with abuse of headquarters and of other lodges. No confidence, no tolerance, no general direction seemed to remain. The Central Committee and the secretary feebly protested, only to be met by proposals that the Committee be forbidden to make any comments or the secretary to stand for re-election.*

In August, 1877, the London Lodges got permission to strike a large job in Fleet Street—the Law Courts—for an extra ½d. an hour. Such a permission was imbecile. Trade was already rapidly on the decline, and the

* O.S.M. *Returns*, May, 1874; January, September, 1875; February, 1876; June, 1877.

employers were prepared to fight to the end. Blacklegs were imported from America and the Continent, and though Broadhurst proclaimed that "an English mason is worth three foreigners," the work proceeded well enough. Magistrates, as usual, threw all their weight upon the employers' side, sentencing strikers heavily on frivolous pretexts and treating indulgently offending blacklegs, including two cases of attempted murder. The strike went on over the winter. The Central Committee proposed to close it, but the Society rejected its advice. Broadhurst, called in to rally the strikers, practically told them it was hopeless. The fault, he said, lay in the union's constitution: if they had had a central authority which was a real executive, they would have fought in 1875, when it was first suggested, and have been forbidden to come out in 1877. The only hope of victory lay in the progress of education: "when the School Board has done another ten years of its work, the Capitalist will find a very different body of men to deal with."* The masons took his implied advice and went back defeated in April. The strike had cost £24,000, and the Society was in debt. It could not raise enough money, next year, even to shift the seat of government from Cardiff: it had to stay in the hands of the unfortunate Welshmen until the bills could be paid. Members were pouring out of the society in an astounding manner: the figures fell from 27,188 in 1877 to 12,609 in 1880 and 11,066 in 1883. It was distracted and helpless: its provincial lodges fought uselessly on their own funds or accepted defeat as they chose. The society which had once alone defeated the General Master Builders' Association was as defenceless as a local trade club. Even the conservatism of the masons could not mistake the lesson;

* Burns, Various.

slowly and sulkily the members agreed to reorganise the union more on amalgamated lines. In 1881 they agreed —upon Broadhurst's demand, he says*—to abolish the Central Committee in favour of a General Council, with large powers, elected by the whole society and selecting an Executive from its own ranks. In 1883 they agreed to pin down the wandering seat of government and have a permanent office in London. But these plans were agreed to reluctantly, and the further innocent suggestion that every member, for office use, should have a number was rounded on savagely with the remark "This profound proposal will necessitate the use of a hot poker during the ceremony of initiating new members." Dyer had died in 1883, exhausted by the unequal struggle, and under his successor, William Hancock, the society quietened down to a certain extent, but did not recover. In 1889 considerable areas had passed out of unionism: there was no lodge whatever on the East Coast from Grimsby to Chatham, and inland there were only the two small lodges of King's Lynn and Norwich. In the whole of Wales there were two lodges—St. David's and Pembroke, containing ten members. It was proposed that the society amalgamate with the Scottish society and the Irish (if such could be found to exist), also that it arrange for a systematic campaign through Trades Councils to recover the lost areas. It was observed that the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters had been deeply grateful in 1862 for a note inserted by Harnott in the *Return*, telling his members to instruct the joiners they met to join the new society: undoubtedly it would now return the favour. The members received all these proposals with a negative: they were now not prepared to exert themselves on

* Broadhurst, 45.

behalf of the union or in its reform, but preferred to remain, like Byzantine Greeks, in the happy contemplation of past glory.*

Every union in these disastrous years lost members. To that statement there is one sinister exception, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners. Its membership increased, because the leakage was made up by other means.† From 1878 to 1880 Prior was engaged deliberately in an attempt at union-murder; for the first time in union history a society in a time of depression turned all its energy not into fighting an employer but into driving a rival out of existence.

Under Last's guidance the General Union had made some attempt to imitate A.S.C.J. benefits and policy without reforming its organisation. Last thus defined his policy :—

"The notion of swelling a Society with a host of new "Lodges is highly to be reprobated, for hastily organ- "ised Lodges very often become a source of weakness "instead of strength. Time, it is said, alters all things, "and certain it is the basis of such Societies as ours is "unmistakably altered by it. Years ago little seemed to "be thought of or cared about, if only we could make "both ends meet, by contributing just sufficient to carry "on a strike, either to keep up existing wages or to ob- "tain an advance; but now we have many different "forms of relief of the most praiseworthy kind distri- "buted far and wide, at the same time keeping in view "the fact that our Society is essentially based upon "broad Trades Union principles. We have our Super- "annuation Benefit to provide for. We distribute our

* O.S.M. *Returns*, April, 1881; January, March, 1883; May, 1884; June, 1889.

† See Appendix II.

"thousands and tens of thousands in relieving our sick "and suffering Members and those of us who may have "the misfortune of being out of work; any of our Mem- "bers who unfortunately, by fire or other cause, are de- "prived of their tools, are compensated to the full value "of them out of our funds. Those of our unfortunate "brethren who, in their journey through life, are from "accidents or other causes prevented from following "their trade for a livelihood, we solace by placing a sum "of money at their disposal which, by careful manage- "ment, may give them one more start in life. And do we "not bury our Members and their deceased wives with "respectability? Where is the man who can say with truth "that any one of our eligible Members was ever disgraced "with a pauper's grave? Having these benevolent ob- "jects in view I say it is of the utmost importance never to "lose sight of the fact that the greatest care and discretion "is required so as not to encumber the Society with "Lodges not self-supporting, or in other words, only "consisting of sufficient Members to pay the necessary "Officers' salaries and general working expenses."*

A trifling improvement in the rules had even been agreed to in 1870, by which the Executive was elected by the whole society, with a subordinate "Government Committee" consisting of three of its members living in the town which was the seat of government. While Last lived, the clumsy financial arrangements were just operable and the good years placed no strain on the constitution. He could even write in 1875 that "the state of the Society throughout is such as to be a matter for sincere congratulation," and next year the Society had 11,841 members and funds in the hands of the Lodges above twenty-two thousand pounds. But in 1876 it

* G.U. Annual, 1874-75.

appears (there are regrettable gaps in the records) that Last died or resigned, and a man named Lindsay became secretary, followed by one called Foster.

The essential vices of the union were shown as soon as the depression began. The Manchester Lodges in midsummer 1877, while trade was still good, put in a demand for an increase, which led to a prolonged struggle with the employers. Their executive was in its heart convinced of the unwisdom of the struggle, but Manchester was the seat of government and it was overborne. The struggle lasted 53 weeks and exhausted the finances of the General Union, besides involving the Amalgamated in considerable expense. At its conclusion—in unqualified defeat—Prior, with ominous courtesy, invited the General Union to discuss amalgamation. The invitation was refused, and Prior and his executive began war upon them.

The old officials of the A.S.C.J. are naturally reluctant to revive old wounds by discussing the exact events of this period,* but the broad outlines are clear. Rule 3, concerning admission to the Amalgamated, was suspended for three years (1878-1880) in order that the General Union members might be brought in in batches. From the complaints of " agents " made by the defeated side, it is clear that members of the Amalgamated entered General Union Lodges merely for the purpose of sowing discontent. They pointed to the gross incompetence of the centre, the financial disorder and the unfitness of the union even for trade warfare. They induced Lodges to make impossible demands on headquarters, and to hold up money that was due. Before long the General Union was no longer, through these tactics, able to pay its promised benefits, and its

* "We used Prussian methods on them," one remarked to me.

members stampeded into the Amalgamated. Each Lodge that came over was used by the rival society as a basis for a further attack. As if they had been in fact prisoners of an enemy army, the Amalgamated took General Union members only in squads or batches of ten or more: it did not admit isolated stragglers. The "Government Committee" sat idly helpless in Manchester: the Secretary stole the funds. No doubt some decline would have occurred in any case, but the extreme disorganisation and demoralisation was due to Prior's deliberate attack. Perhaps fifty per cent. of the General Union membership was annexed by the Amalgamated: five-sixths of the rest abandoned trade union membership altogether. In 1883, when a new secretary, William Matkin, was appointed, there were only 1,750 members. The Amalgamated had then nearly 23,000 members. It had begun the crisis with 16,000, the General Union with 11,000. The raid of the Amalgamated had reduced the older union to an impotence from which it never recovered; at the time it even looked as though it had been destroyed altogether.*

The victory of the amalgamated principles in other trades, if less dramatic, was not less decisive. In 1876 the Manchester Order of Bricklayers, relying on its membership of over 8,000, refused the demand of the London Order for equal representation upon local committees on "working rules." It had made no compromise with the new ideas whatever: trade movements were still initiated by the lodges and approved by the lodges without central intervention. Loans from the Central Fund to lodges by now ran into many hundred pounds—mostly bad debts. Headquarters had to take a vote of the Society before it could purchase a copy of Howell's book on Trade Union Law. As was usual, funds

* Higgenbotham ; Chandler 68 ; G.U. Annuals, 1877-8, 1884-5.

were badly managed and fraud frequent. Houseley, moreover, was continuing his policy of attacking the London Order surreptitiously—a foolish policy, for when the storm broke, Coulson had, and used, a legitimate excuse for "poaching" members. The full blast of the storm was felt only in 1879: the Manchester membership, which had already fallen to 5,900, fell again to 3,900. By 1882 it had lost another thousand. The London Order, on the other hand, which started with 6,300, lost only six hundred during the worst of the storm, and had recovered them in 1884. The Manchester Order plunged further to disaster. Houseley, who was at least devoted to his Union, voluntarily cut his salary twice, but he did not recover the confidence of his union. Nor had he learnt anything: the Liverpool Lodge wrote to Coulson asking if he would suggest terms for the amalgamation of the two Orders. Coulson sent the letter on to Houseley, who denounced the sensible action of the Liverpool Lodge secretary in terms of almost maniacal rage. "The Council," he wrote, "has long ago felt sure that his only object was to damage our Society, as much as he could, but they little dreamt that he was maturing a scheme to *sell* the society." A movement, not to reform the union but to replace Houseley, arose : several funds were taken out of headquarters' control and handed to the Lodges, and in 1890 the seat of Government was moved from Sheffield to Stockport, after grave accusations of forgery had been made. This entailed, as it was meant to, Houseley's resignation, and his opponent, G. H. Clarke, was elected in his place. The membership had fallen to 1,190. The London Order had now over 8,000 members, and was wealthy enough even in 1883 to spend £4,000 on new offices.*

* Unity Reports, December, 1876 ; January, 1880 ; October, 1882 ; June, 1889 ; O.B.S. Annual, 1889.

The progress of amalgamated principles in the painting trade was even more gratifying. The small London Amalgamated Society, though complaining of "unprecedented depression," had not lost membership: from 600 it had risen to 800, and by 1886 had painfully reached 1,067—though six local London painters' clubs had more than its total membership, scattered all over the south and Midlands. More important than the history of Shipton's feeble society was the conversion, after severe internal struggles, of the conservative Manchester Alliance into an amalgamated union of the strictest type. Up till 1877 the Alliance prospered on old lines; it contained then sixty-six societies and over 7,000 members. It was occupied mainly in local quarrels in which demarcation disputes were growing more and more frequent. Its guiding principle was the "Oldham Resolution" to the effect that "it is unwise to interfere in the internal arrangements of individual societies." In that year it extended to Ireland, enrolling a Dublin club claiming to date from 1670, with "a Powerful Brass Band."

The effects of the storm of 1878 are not shown in the reports of the Society, except by the mere figures :—

1878	7,076	members
1879	4,785	,,
1883	2,505	,,

Matters were made worse by the outbreak of a violent quarrel on trivial grounds, between two Manchester societies and another newly-formed club, which lasted for five years and crippled the Alliance's strength. A proposal was put forward at the annual meeting in 1879, with Secretary Sharples' approval, for the reorganisation of the society as an "amalgamated" union. Delegate after delegate spoke approving of the project, but stating

that his members did not understand it, and it was rejected amid general regret. An attempt was made, unsuccessfully, to start a rival "Midland Alliance" in 1882, and the continuance of the decline in membership induced the Alliance to take the final step in 1885. The old Alliance was formally dissolved in April of that year: on July the first the new "National Amalgamated Society of Operative House Painters and Decorators" came into being, with branches representing most, but not all, of the old societies. It had Benevolent Benefit, Disabled Benefit, Superannuation Benefit, Out of Work Benefit, Funeral Benefit, Turn-out Benefit, Sick Benefit, Victimisation Benefit. Branch accounts were properly audited, and the executive had real powers. It was a society of which Applegarth himself would have approved, though the patron that it claimed was Bismarck.*

An equally sudden transformation occurred in the slating trade. We have already observed how slating was invaded by bricklayers and plasterers. Nevertheless, there was in the large towns sufficient purely slating work to keep the craft alive, and local clubs maintained an uncertain existence. In 1873 nine Northern local clubs—Birmingham, Hull, Liverpool, Newcastle, Nottingham, South Shields, Stockton-on-Tees, Sunderland and York—united to form a society which appears to have been a weak federation with few binding rules. The head office was at Sheffield. As in other

* Alliance, 1879, A.M., 1885 Annual Report, Painters 1886 Annual. The Preface to the rules compared the new society to the German Empire: "Look at the great success achieved by the German States who were only a few years ago in a weak and disorganised condition, and were always in fear of some disaster befalling them; but now, having adopted the principles of amalgamation, they have become so powerful that they command the respect of the whole civilised world."

cases, the storm of 1878 put too great a strain upon the organisation: the Central Office became embarrassed, and in 1882 the secretary made what he thought was the best of a bad job by disappearing with all the funds and all the records. A conference naturally had to be held at once, and the signal illustration of the weaknesses of the old system had not been wasted upon the members. The society was reconstituted upon "amalgamated" principles, changing its name to "The Amalgamated Slaters' and Tilers' Provident Society," with stringent and detailed rules and considerable friendly benefits. Headquarters henceforward were at Newcastle-on-Tyne.*

The effect of the crisis upon the Plasterers was illogical. Previously, as we have observed, the National Association was an "amalgamated" union. Headquarters were fixed, after one move, at Birmingham. The central funds received the whole subscription of sixpence per week, while branches were forbidden to raise more than 2d. per week for local purposes by levy, or to correspond with each other except by the medium of headquarters.† The control of policy which follows on control of the purse was exercised by C. O. Williams steadily in discouragement of trade action and in favour of a large accumulation of funds. In spite of restiveness from the rank and file, his policy on the whole had been crowned with success. Quarrels began to decrease, and he seemed at last to have secured the confidence of the members. His legal knowledge was now considerable, and he frequently personally appeared in court to protect his members. He had evolved a system of bookkeeping and conduct of business which remained unchanged in essentials for forty years. He had secured recognition as

* Wilson.

† Plasterers' Rules, 1878

an official of merit in the larger trade union world, and had sat on the Parliamentary Committee of Congress, until he lost his seat through association with the "Fair Traders."* The society was still small—in 1876, before the depression, it had only 5,162 members—but it was wealthy, widely spread but closely knit.† It suffered in the depression, though not so greatly as the old-fashioned societies. In 1879 it had still 4,580 members.

But the decline continued next year, and, what was more alarming, the central fund began to shrink seriously. Once this was touched Williams became gravely worried, and at the beginning of 1881, as things got worse, he lost his head entirely. He recommended to his members, and got carried, a series of proposals intended, in his own words, to make the association still "more like the Joiners'." Certain detail amendments were made of unquestionable value. It was decided that a "General Council" representing the whole society should meet every two years, taking the place of a delegate meeting: the Executive Council was to consist of four local members, the General Secretary and four from the society as a whole. The first four met more frequently and formed a sort of sub-Executive. By these means cheap and efficient government could have been secured without disfranchising all the society outside the seat of government. But on top of this Charles Williams recommended a step of extraordinary foolishness, which utterly undid his life work. It should be mentioned that he was ageing—he had been nearly twenty years in the office—and was in very bad health. With a confused idea of bringing their responsibilities home to the members, he not only reduced subscriptions—an excusable

* Lamb.

† 150 Lodges, £14,000 income to Headquarters.

step if not an absolutely necessary one—but abandoned central financial control altogether. The central fund disappeared, except for a trifling amount, and all funds were retained by lodges and equalised at the end of the year. True, benefits were to be administered in accordance with a very detailed code of laws, but there was no means of checking this. These proposals so well suited the prejudices which Williams had been fighting for years, that they were adopted with alacrity, and quickly produced their natural results. The very next year showed a loss of over £1,000, and the Assistant Secretary had to be dismissed for lack of money. The membership fell steadily, till in 1886 there were only 1886 members. The lodges treated the rules and the demands of the General Office with the greatest levity. It was rare indeed that money for current needs was available, and in June, 1884, the head office could not raise £10 to pay a funeral benefit, while the lodges treated its appeals with contempt. In April of the same year it had had to report that it held no funds of any kind whatever. The fierce quarrels which had begun to ebb broke out again with renewed violence. The General Secretary was almost invariably on the worst terms with the Executive, which in its turn found its recommendations rejected by the society almost automatically. Many instances are to be found in the history of trade unionism of societies selecting a general secretary whose advice and policy they treat with contempt, but the Plasterers' seems to be the only society which steadily elected a whole Executive only to flout it. Nor was the Executive itself united : the quarrels between members of it had become so violent in 1884 that they could not meet together in the same room and the General Council had to meet or the Society would have

been without any government at all. Partly as a result of this, Williams' own powers and health began to fail. He had a violent attack of an acute nervous disease, precursor of paralysis, at the end of 1882, " brought on by the serious death of Mr. John Whalley,"* from which he never really recovered, and at the beginning of 1885, when the Association gave a further proof of its reactionary sentiments by shifting the seat of Government (to London), he gave up the unequal struggle and resigned. The Society gave a final indication of the ill-feeling running through it by meanly refusing to grant him a testimonial after 23 years' service.†

* Whalley (Blackburn Weavers) and Williams were both delegates to the Trades Union Congress that year. A few quarrelsome words on a subject of no importance passed between the two, and Whalley walked out of the room. A few minutes later he was found dead, and Williams was prostrated by the shock. For the rest of this paragraph see Plast. Rules, 1881, Annual 1881, Monthly, February, 1881, September, 1882, February, April, June, 1884, January, 1885.

† In later days the leaders of the larger unions were accused of too good living and self-indulgence. It is as well to remember that this was true of very few : most were treated with shocking ingratitude by their members. Both Williams and O'Neil were left to pick up a living as they could. Thomas Sharples, after nearly thirty years' service, was presented, on resigning at the age of 70, with only £23 by the painters, though a 10*s.* pension was added later. We have observed with what distress the stonemasons received the news of Harnott's death. Two years later they refused to give his widow £50 to keep her out of the workhouse. In 1911 only £10 10*s.* was raised for Hancock, of the O.S.M. Hardly any leader, moreover, in his lifetime drew more than £4 a week in this period, and many General Secretaries were thankful that the meanness of their members did not cut them below 40*s.* Houseley, on leaving his post, was stood a dinner —nothing more. But all through this period trade union officials were liable to sudden ups and downs. In the new group such men as Broadhurst did very well, but Shipton, on the other hand, was often enough hard put to it to raise ten shillings. Such meanness is not extinct, but it is on the decline, and Trade Unionists now are more inclined to reward old servants adequately. Mr. Francis Chandler, on retiring, was presented by the A.S.C. and J with £100 for every year he had been in office—£3,000.

With his successors, John Knight (1885) and Arthur Otley (secretary 1885-1896), matters were little improved. Knight, the first London secretary, disappeared after a few months, and it was feared that he had stolen the funds. Relief was expressed when it was found that he had taken nothing more valuable than another member's wife, and Arthur Otley, a hardworking man who had neither Williams' strength nor weakness, took his place. There was a lull in the violence of the disputes, and some confidence began to return. In certain areas the society progressed excellently, through the initiative of local lodges. In particular, the Metropolitan Association, which had failed to protect its members, was absorbed, and two local members of great energy, Hennessy and Cole, made London one of the strongest centres, and in the good years of the early nineties stamped out the sub-contractor, who had been flourishing for years.* But the divisions were still there, and, curiously enough, as better times approached, from 1890 onwards, the quarrels became more frequent and violent. The National Association was like an old-fashioned combustion engine : it progressed by means of a series of explosions. Its motive power was not petrol but fury. When the Secretary was not quarrelling with the Executive, the Executive was quarrelling with the association, and Otley's term of office ends in 1896 with the resignation of the Secretary and every Executive member in a fit of rage. Like an old-fashioned engine, too, it did not run well, and the society remained insignificant until in M. J. Deller it found a secretary whom the members were prepared to respect and trust.

The small United Operative Plumbers' Association was not driven to accept " amalgamated " principles in

* Lamb.

this period. Plumbers have always been, to say the least, most conservative. In 1882, when other unions were considering modifying their principles so far as to demand legally shortened hours, the Plumbers were entirely absorbed by preparations for the Preston Guild, at which their members were instructed to " wear aprons with Plumbers' arms lithographed in colour, trimmed with silk fringe and ribbon beautifully got up and greatly admired, rosettes, white gloves and silk hats." Their union motto was "Defence, not Defiance," and they argued, like an "amalgamated" union, that they were of value to the employers as providers of good workmen. Blackleg labour, they observed, was dangerous : two scabs at Nottingham " had lately to vanish for garrotting, and they were both in one shop : nice men to send into respectable people's houses ! "* But though they had agreed to have a permanent secretary, they went no farther towards centralisation. Indeed, immediately after the appointment of Barnett in 1876, the members started a great game with the Executive Council, chasing it up and down the country like a football. In 1876 the seat of government was moved to Newcastle : no sooner had the office got settled there than it was sent up to Edinburgh : next year again (1878) it was dragged down to Bolton and next year sent across country to Hull, then it was ordered away to vegetate in Sunderland. On the news of this last decision, Barnett resigned, as he could not tolerate any more rushing up and down the country. After this lesson the members relaxed a little their intentness on this particular amusement, though they moved the seat of government in 1882 to Birmingham, in 1885 to Sheffield, and in 1888 to Leicester.

* O.P.Q.R. 1878, October.

It is difficult to say, and the harassed secretary would have had trouble in saying, what effect the bad years had had upon the organisation. In June, 1878, he complained of "uncontrollable, enormous expenses," and continual unsuccessful strikes over all England and Scotland culminated in a disastrous Lancashire lock-out in 1880, which took away a penny an hour. Nevertheless, the society entered the crisis with 2,763 members and had weathered it by 1883 with 2,126 members. The funds—held locally—had, no doubt, disappeared, but the membership was little damaged. The society entered the crisis insignificant: it did not emerge more insignificant. Indeed, with the appointment of the new Secretary, George Cherry, in 1879, it gained something in strength and more in reputation. He was an official of the older type, obstinate and narrow in many ways, his views confined to his craft, but energetic, of enormous force of character, able, unquestionably honest—in short, a man much of the type of Richard Harnott. But the days were passed when Harnott could make his union perhaps the strongest in England, and plumbing was not so extensive a craft as masonry. Cherry gave the society stability and some rudiments of a coherent policy, but he could not lift it, for all his efforts, out of its relative insignificance while the members held to such old-fashioned and outworn forms of government. The membership rose slowly, and had reached 3,984 in 1889; it continued to grow till, at the beginning of 1891, three Scots lodges broke away. The check caused by this was soon overcome and progress resumed.*

It will be remembered that was the second split-off in Scotland. The earlier breakaway had occurred in 1872, and the society still existed (calling itself the United

* Edinburgh, Leith, Coatbridge. O.P.Q.R., 1891.

Operative Plumbers Association of Scotland), though it had only 154 members in three lodges in and round Glasgow.* It was extremely weak, and what recovery it recorded—it had 298 members in 1889—was due to combined propaganda movements with "the Amalgamated," as it miscalled the English society. It quickly absorbed the new breakaway, but it remained feeble for many years. More interesting than the detailed history of this small organisation are the reasons for this fissiparous tendency of Scottish plumbers. These are to be found mainly in the relatively backward state of the Scottish building industry, more particularly plumbing, and have by no means yet disappeared. In the first place, there are fewer ship plumbers. The English society at one time had probably more than half its whole membership in engineering or shipbuilding, and not in building at all, while the Scottish association had no more than sixty ship plumbers all told. It was universally felt in Scotland that the English association neglected the interests of the building section for the others, and spent the money and time of the association in conflicts in shipbuilding and engineering, where in the nature of things it counted for very little, and the money was as good as wasted. In the second place, the habits of Scottish plumbers differed. The invasion of the general master-builder has gone much less far than in England. Master-plumbers and master-plumbers' associations count for much more. Employment is consequently much more regular—many of the members of the Scottish association had worked in the one shop the better part of their lives. There are very few signs of "casualisation" in Scottish plumbing: there are few firms that would take on a number of plumbers for a

* Glasgow, Paisley, Greenock. Scottish O.P., 1883.

large job and turn them off again. Partly as a result of this, the Scottish plumber is an even more conservative worker than the English : he has his fixed holidays and would not simply " knock off " for a space for a rest and go on the unemployed list like his fellow. Hence the unemployment (" idle ") benefit was always an offence to the Scotsman : he paid in and the Englishman took out. On the basis of less unemployment, a Scottish society could pay higher benefits for the same subscription as the English, and the temptation to accept the industrial weakness with the financial profit so secured was too great to be resisted.

The main interest in the plumbing trade in these years, however, is external and connected, oddly enough, with the name of King Edward III. The London Guilds, or Livery Companies, had slumbered on for several hundred years. In 1833 a Royal Commission was appointed, on whose report the affairs of the provincial companies were disposed of, but the London Companies were wealthy enough not merely to refuse to give the Commissioners any information, but to prevent any action being taken by Parliament. Nearly fifty years passed before they were disturbed again, but in 1876 the propaganda of the City Guilds Reform Association,* encouraged by certain remarks made by Mr. Gladstone on quitting office, made a fierce attack upon the gross malversation of funds of which they had been guilty for many years. Certain Companies were very wealthy, and the members were squandering upon their own bellies large endowments meant to educate and protect the poor of their own craft. A serious attack having been begun, the Companies made attempts to conceal some of the grossness of the frauds. In 1879 negotiations

* See their Reform Fly Sheets in A.S.W., various.

were begun "between the London Amalgamated House Painters and the Court of the Painters' Company in the City of London for instituting a connecting link between workmen and their employers for the purpose of mutual benefit by general improvement of the craft."* But the most convulsive action proceeded from the Worshipful Company of Plumbers. This body had heard with indifference the appeals of Mr. George Shaw, one of its members, to resume some of its old functions, but the threat implied in the appointment of a Royal Commission of Enquiry in 1880 made it practically surrender itself into his hands, after hastily voting £50 to the City and Guilds' Technical Institute. Shaw, although a master-plumber, seems to have had the wildest ideas of the possibilities of revival, and seriously announced that the Company would now resume all its powers under the Charter given by King Edward III. These included not merely the education of plumbers, but the restriction of apprentices and regulation of the trade down to the minutest detail. This would have involved the suppression of the operatives' union, which naturally protested and referred to Shaw as "Rip van Winkle."

After a short experience he drew in his horns and moderated his demands to certain proposals intended to raise the general standard of plumbing. There was good reason for his being encouraged to proceed. Apprenticeship and all other union safeguards had disappeared: scamped plumbing was now the rule, with its natural follower, disease. This in itself was nothing, but the British ruling class was seriously alarmed by the appearance of disease among the wealthy. A prominent Admiralty official had just died of drinking a glass of water,

* L.P. Annual, 1879.

and the drainage was thought to be responsible. Spring Gardens drains were said to kill the higher as well as the lower paid staff wholesale. Typhoid fever, it was announced, arose from sewer gas, "and has appeared almost as much in the mansions of the wealthy as in the dwellings of the poor."* For these reasons Shaw got great general sympathy in his efforts to revive the Plumbers' Company, and, besides the fretful operatives, a large and approving number of masters, architects and delegates from health and housing organisations attended the meeting that he called in September, 1884, as Master of the Company. A council was appointed, of worshipful members and others, to inspect and "seal" good materials, to compile a register of all competent plumbers, who should write the initials R.P. after their name, and to make such arrangements as were possible for a revival of technical education and apprenticeship.

The United Operative Plumbers fell to the lure of the last suggestion. The revival of apprenticeship sounded excellent to them. Their society sent a representative to the Worshipful Company's Registration Council, and the best qualified members, including the secretary, enrolled themselves as R.P.s. They even supported the Company's bill for compulsory registration, hoping to make plumbing a profession like medicine and an R.P. as important a person as an M.D. The movement went on merrily for some years, but the master builders, in opposition to the sectional interests of the master plumbers, killed their bill in the House of Commons, and registration became discredited through the belief that employers placed unfit names of relations or others upon

* Shaw. The effects on the operative plumber had always been deadly; the average age at death of a union member in 1890 was only 37 years. Webb & Cox, *The 8-hour Day*, p. 142.

the list through influence. Yet the list of "R.P.s." was published by the union until the outbreak of war in 1914.

The effect of the slump of 1878 in Scotland was, in the trades where we have any evidence,* much severer. The centre of the Scottish building trade has always been the city of Glasgow: probably two-thirds of the building in Scotland was carried on by firms centred in or closely connected with Glasgow. Various reasons had combined to turn the general prosperity of the building trades in Scotland into a golden decade. The big profits made by ironmasters and others in the North of England and Scotland out of the Franco-Prussian War had mostly been put into building. The large number of schools that had to be built all over Scotland under the new Act meant a steady supply of large and paying jobs with no risk attached, which at once absorbed the floating unemployed. The City of Glasgow, in 1866, had been granted large powers for city improvement, which the Corporation had used for buying land. Great tracts were leased to speculative builders on easy terms, and the City of Glasgow Bank financed them. Building became feverish: Glasgow burst its bounds. Money was urgently sought for: the Bank was giving 7 per cent. on deposits. Building workers came from all over England and Ireland: hours were short and wages excellent. Just as the boom had passed its height in the autumn of 1878, when the schools were all finished and the speculative builders troubled about letting their houses, the City of Glasgow Bank failed for twelve million pounds.† The whole

* Records of the Associated Carpenters and Joiners are lost. Their membership fell from 6,642 in 1875, to 4,673 in 1880, about which figure it remained. Webb, Appendix vi.

† Baird.

Scottish building trade ceased, paralysed for seven years. Master builder after master builder was ruined. Employment could hardly be got by any operative: the trade had to try to exist on odd jobs of repairs. The effect on the fabric of the unions, and upon their standards of life, was disastrous. The Plasterers had secured a minimum hourly rate of 10d. (London rates were 8d.-9d.), which was in itself good pay at the prices then ruling. Hardly anybody was paid only this minimum: any reasonably skilled man could command eighteenpence or more. The English National Association permitted, or could not prevent, the Glasgow Society from striking against any reduction. Such an action, urged mostly by the English and Irish immigrants, was madness, but their great previous prosperity seems to have misled the plasterers into thinking that they were superior to other trades and could be exempt from the common ruin. They struck, and remained out, to the indifference of the employers, for sixteen-and-a-half weeks, when the strike closed in utter defeat. Every trace of organisation vanished and a period of nine years of absolute non-unionism began. All the trade regulations of the society—it had limited every master plasterer to four apprentices—were swept away. From 1s. 6d. and 2s. an hour plasterers' wages fell below those of labourers. For, although they were now nominally paid 6d. an hour, and labourers received only 5½d., many plasterers were glad enough to take work at 5d. an hour. From the proudest and best paid building craftsmen they had become the worst-paid and most oppressed, within the space of nine months.*

* Baird, Lamb. Plasterers' previous rates in the east averaged 1*s.* 3*d.* an hour, with 3*s.* travelling money.

Amid the general destruction, one union alone weathered through. The Amalgamated Slaters of Scotland recorded very little decrease in membership and very little wastage in funds. Their members had always been mostly concerned in small jobbing work, and the complete suspension of new work did not affect them nearly so much as it did other crafts. Repairing and jobbing work went on much as before, and the slaters did not suffer much. Once ill-paid and little-esteemed, they rose to the first rank in the building trades. They alone were able to keep up a standard rate—6½d.—and it is claimed, as may well be true, that in 1879 that rate was higher than any other craft could command.*

The disastrous fall of the English Stonemasons might plausibly have been ascribed to the death of Richard Harnott and the running of the society by nonentities. No such excuse could be brought forward in the case of the Scottish Masons. Matthew Allan was still secretary; his authority was as unquestioned as Harnott's had ever been, and his talents were little, if at all, inferior. The event showed that no one man's abilities, however great, could surmount the crisis with an instrument out of date. The Union had reached in 1877 the most prosperous point in its whole career. It had 13,759 members in 116 lodges and £18,470 in the bank. Ill fortune had decided that the crisis should come when the seat of Government was at Aberdeen, where the local lodge was weak and out of touch with the rest of the society.

The Central Committee was horrified to hear of the Bank's failure in September, 1878. Well over seventeen thousand pounds of the union's money was in the bank,

* Cross.

and from a wealthy society it had become penniless overnight. Eventually the National, another Glasgow Bank, arranged to give some assistance to the creditors of the ruined bank and the masons got about a third of their money back, but it was little enough with which to face the crisis. Everywhere the employers were presenting demands for heavy reductions, everywhere cuts of a 1d. and ½d. an hour were accepted one after the other. All that Allan could do was to prevent his union rushing to destruction like the plasterers : he used the *Returns* for a monotonous exhortation to "give way, give way," and succeeded in preventing ruin. He did no more : the constitution of the union was not sufficiently centralised, nor his various Central Committees experienced enough, to allow of his stopping the employers' drive by selecting this or that lodge or demand on which a fight might, perhaps, have been put up. All he could do was to turn a general policy of resistance into a general policy of flight. By 1883 the membership had fallen to 6,105 in 96 lodges, and the eighteen thousand pounds in the bank had fallen to eighteen hundred. That it was not worse was due almost altogether to the enormous efforts of Matthew Allan. The same year the strain became too much for him, and on August 21 he died suddenly, nominally from an apoplectic fit, but actually from the overwork and worry of the crisis.*

After the brief secretaryship of one Thomas Walker, his place was taken in 1885 by John Craig, secretary for ten years. Craig was to Allan what Dyer was to Harnott. Dull, well-meaning, but without character or

* He was 58 years old and had been 16 years in office. See S.O.M. *Returns*, August, 1883. Also for this period S.O.M. *Returns*, September, 1878, Annuals 1877, 1878, 1883.

competence, his attention was wholly occupied with the routine work of the office. No sort of guide or lead was given by headquarters : the direction of union policy was left to the caprice of the lodges or more frequently to no one at all. Money ceased to come in regularly; the membership figures, instead of recovering, slumped again. They fell to 3,542 in 1885, in 1886 to 2,886, in 1889 to 2,022. In the second year of his office, 1886, the funeral claims were not paid, and headquarters, now at Edinburgh, appealed to the Lodges for suggestions that might save the society. The sick fund was closed, without any result but a further diminution of members. Aberdeen Lodge, once the seat of government, went so far as to propose dissolution. No lodge, it observed, had responded to the appeal of the Central Committee. Headquarters " state there are a number of claims to meet and no money to pay them with." Worse than that, however, was the complete disappearance of the Trade Union spirit in Scotland, and the reception generally given to union delegates. " The boldest may quail when called on to do duty as collectors." It would, perhaps, be possible to found a society with no funeral or superannuation benefits, but the old one must go first. The Central Committee indignantly repudiated this as " a wicked scheme, a *Stab in the Back,*" but fine words could not help the society. It remained in its miserable condition till the beginning of the nineties, when an attempt was made to reduce Craig's wages. The Glasgow Lodge replied, truly enough, that he was incompetent, but that to cut his wages was no remedy. He kept his salary—40s.—mainly because only 135 members troubled to vote either way. But David Rennie, a man trained by Matthew Allan, was, in 1891, elected

"travelling delegate," nominally to organise lodges, but in fact to put strength into Craig's nerveless hands.*

* See S.O.M. Annuals 1885, 1889, 1891 ; *Returns* June, July, 1886, October, 1890. Aberdeen Lodge drops out of the lists after its proposal was rejected. It did not break away to form the Aberdeen Union, as has been supposed, but died. The S.O.M. Letter-books show this. Craig's daughter (see later) writes to the Lodge Secretary, J. Mackie, on September 30, '87, "I was desired to express the regret of the C.C. of your communication. . . . I am desired by the C.C. to ask you, before closing up our connections, do you not think it advisable to convene a general meeting of the Masons of your City ? " A further letter of October 13 remained, like this, without reply. The lodge had dissolved. The Aberdeen Union was formed a year later, by the Aberdeen United Trades Council, from a group which had apparently no connection with the old lodge, and among whom was no John Mackie. See their *Journal* for October, 1919.

CHAPTER XV

THE BUILDING TRADES ISOLATED

CHANGE OF OFFICERS IN 1890 * COULSON'S DEATH * ACTIVITIES IN TRADES UNION CONGRESS * HENRY BROADHURST * END OF LIBERAL DOMINATION * "NEW UNIONISM" * CONGRESS OF 1890 * BURNS' DESCRIPTION * BUILDING TRADES DRAW ALOOF * BUILDERS' LABOURERS' UNIONS * PROSPERITY * SCOTTISH SOCIETIES * NARROW-MINDED POLICY * SCOTTISH MASONS * WEAKNESS OF CRAIG * ENGLISH PAINTERS' SOCIETIES * THE LARGER UNIONS * DECAY OF THE LODGES * NO TRADE ACTIVITIES * APPRENTICESHIP * CRAFT QUARRELS * PLUMBERS' CONFLICTS * CARPENTERS AND JOINERS * 1891 LOCK-OUT * FEDERATION PROPOSALS * STONEMASONS REACTIONARY * CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE TWO BRICKLAYERS' ORDERS * MANCHESTER ORDER ECLIPSED * BATCHELOR'S PROPOSALS * PLASTERERS MORE ACTIVE * DELLER'S CHARACTER * LOCK-OUT OF 1899 * BUILDING OFFICIALS MEET TOGETHER

1885–1899

IN the years 1889 and 1890, the officers of the main building Trades Unions were almost entirely changed, without, however, the least change in policy resulting. Although in the larger trade union world an unparalleled ferment was going on, the renewal of the staffs of the building trades unions, necessitated mainly by advancing age, was completed without the slightest attempt to put in office candidates representing new policies or new ideas.

The new "National Amalgamated Society of House and Ship Painters and Decorators" (N.A.S.O.H.A.S.P.A.D.),

which had taken the place of the old Manchester Alliance, had found itself in considerable difficulties very early on. Although "all its rules were taken from the Carpenters and Joiners,"* neither the members nor the General Secretary, Thomas Sharples, were really much versed in "amalgamated" principles. The General Council, representing the whole Society, and meeting yearly, regularly quarrelled with the localised Executive Council, and in 1888 the branches were inundated with circulars from both bodies, abusing each other in the most unreasonable and savage manner, and using language so insulting that it must have sown discord in every town. The Society was not flourishing, having only 1,863 members in thirty-five branches, so that for the moment the London Society was nearly its equal. The immediate cause of the quarrel of 1888 was the alleged incompetence of Sharples, which two years later could not longer be concealed. The concentration required for the running of an amalgamated union was too much for the old man—he was 70 in 1890—and letters remained unanswered, contradictory and sometimes illegal advice was given to branches, and the Executive had continually to meet to decide trifling points which he had no longer the necessary resolution to deal with himself. He resigned with the greatest reluctance: his forty shillings a week was a serious loss to him and a collection only realised twenty-three pounds. His place was taken by George Sunley, who directed affairs as Sharples would have done, had he been younger and more vigorous. A similar change took place in the London Society. Its dismally slow growth—it had only reached 1,087 members in 1888—was commonly attributed to George Shipton's preoccupation with the

* Painters' Quarterly, June, 1890. Sharples died in 1905, aged 86.

affairs of the London Trades Council, of which he was secretary, and the political activities of Broadhurst's group, of which he was a leading member. He was practically extruded from office in 1889 by a rival, E. C. Gibbs, who announced that Shipton had taken with him all accounts but those of the last quarter, and had not touched the membership registers for nine years. A change in office methods, but no change in policy, resulted from the election of the new secretary.

In 1890 also, William Williams entered the office of the Stonemasons as Assistant Secretary, but his subordinate position prevented him making any serious change. The same year, as already noted, Houseley's place as General Secretary of the Manchester Order of Bricklayers, or Manchester Unity as it was coming to be called, was taken by George H. Clarke, of Nottingham. Clarke made no change in policy : as usual, the change was only in energy. The society was, as the Belfast Lodge (more than double the size of any other) remarked, "sickle, feeble and dying" and Clarke's efforts were confined to the issuing of appeals for new members, propaganda work, and the institution of a sick fund. It was in 1890 also that Coulson of the London Order of Bricklayers (O.B.S.) decided to resign. Attacks were by now being made on him very generally, led by an Executive member, John Batchelor. The grievances alleged were that he was dictatorial and used the union *Circular* to push a personal policy not endorsed by the Executive. His disease was, in fact, that he was growing old: his firmness had turned into narrow obstinacy, his deliberation into slowness, his strong partizanship into personal rancour. Earlier on, when the union had been weak and immature, his autocratic methods had had their justification. His neglect of advice and

contempt of his rivals had been justified by his own striking superiority. His methods of blunt violence were useful in dealing with men who were really not at all accustomed to Trade Unionism. At one time he and a friend visited the Oxford branch, which intended to seize the local funds and divide them. He entered the Lodge meeting, walked up to the box, seized the bank book, and attempted to escape with it. He—the General Secretary of the Society—and his friend fought the whole lodge meeting and he did not give up the book till he was dragged down to the floor by weight of numbers. These rough methods he carried into office business. On one occasion he even refused the Printing Sub-Committee of the Executive access to the E.C. minutes, through some fancied slight, and himself held the book under his arm until they abandoned the attempt to see their own records. Such behaviour was well enough when the union was young, but it was now fully developed and there were men about him on the Executive and General Councils who had experience of trade union matters and resented being treated with contempt, especially when Coulson's obstinacy was increased by the crotchetiness of old age.

But even in the decline of his life he was not, like Sharples, the man to cling weakly to office after his powers had begun to fail. In the *Annual Report* for 1890 he told the membership: "At the end of June next I shall be ready to place my work in other hands, as I find the constant strain and anxiety of office is more than my health will allow," and added somewhat sadly that he had "devoted the best part of my life, thirty-one years" to the service of the Society. His strongest critic, Batchelor, was elected to his place by a large majority, and the last years of his life were unhappy. He felt

deeply the implied criticism, and the ingratitude and neglect of the members : he did not survive quitting office two years, but died in 1893, depressed and disappointed. How short were the memories of his members was shown by the fact that no record of his death appeared in the *Annual Report* and only a casual note among the various news in the *Monthly Circular*.* Yet there passed away with him the last of the big union-builders of the sixties. If he had not the versatility and meticulousness of Applegarth, if he was relatively clumsy and violent in policy, he did not have either the dangerous facility which made Applegarth rationalise certain sound principles of union structure into a whole philosophy of industrial peace. For all his association with the Junta, Coulson was always at bottom a fighting leader and never entirely forgot the experiences and feelings of the worker on the job. The saying of his already quoted—" We have no fair field, we ask no favour "—was a typical phrase and one that Applegarth would never have used.

In Applegarth's union changes of personnel made little difference : the office routine ran on changelessly, impersonally, like a machine. J. D. Prior, who had carried Applegarth's theories to the uttermost logical limit, resigned in 1881 to take up the more congenial post of a Government Inspector. J. S. Murchie took his place, and, under his administration, there is little to record, for most of the Amalgamated's energies were spent in avoiding any struggles. Money occasionally was granted to other smaller societies involved in fights, but self-defence seemed to be nearly a forgotten art. Murchie's main activities lay in the Trades Union

* Ruffell, O.B.S. Annual, 1890, Monthly, June, 1890 ; July, 1891 ; July, 1893.

Congress, where he enthusiastically supported Broadhurst, until at the Bradford Congress in 1888 he burst a blood-vessel and died within the week. His place was taken by Francis Chandler (born 1849), whose past record suggested a possibility of change. The conflict of 1872 had left behind it a "London United Trades Committee," with Charles Matkin as secretary. Chandler became secretary in 1876, and actually directed, in spite of the official and extreme displeasure of the Society's Executive, a strike for "grinding-time,"* and against piecework. But that was twelve years before: his views had changed and the tradition of Applegarth was harmoniously carried on. Of his rival, it is sufficient to say that the General Union lived. William Matkin's tremendous exertions could not prevent a further collapse of membership down to 1,561 in 1889. It looked as though it was doomed to extinction or to be swallowed up by its younger rival that it now enviously called "the *Great Society*."†

The energies of the ablest and best-trusted men in the building trade unions were turned in this period elsewhere than to the improvement of their societies. The direction of the unions was in most cases left to a less able man. Henry Broadhurst, for example, did little or nothing to help the Masons, and their guidance was left to Hancock, a man of far less strength and personality. Howell never gave a minute of his time to the Manchester Unity. Shipton neglected his office duties. Nearly all their attention was turned to the Trades Union Congress, where the Builders' leaders formed the nucleus of an "old gang" which continued and even

* Payment for an extra hour on quitting work, necessary for sharpening tools.

† G.U. Annual, 1885-86.

exaggerated the policy of Applegarth and Allan. Under their direction the Trades Union Congress had become little more than a Liberal election instrument. Its last chance of being an efficient industrial body had disappeared in 1878, when Broadhurst announced that it would not intervene between trade and trade or union and union.* It thus abandoned the right, which the Junta had often exercised, to settle inter-union quarrels, and little was left but to discuss general topics, necessarily political, that affected all alike. Broadhurst secured election to Parliament for Stoke-on-Trent in 1878 ; Thomas Burt and Alexander MacDonald, two other leaders of identical politics, had entered as early as 1874. Broadhurst (1840-1911), however, was the unquestioned leader of the " old gang." He had powers of speech which, while they did not often rise to eloquence, were far above those of his rivals. His mind was not original or strong, but it was quick and versatile. He was obstinate, though he could be deflected by appeals to his vanity. His talents for organisation, especially Parliamentary organisation, were considerable. Politically, he and his group were doctrinaire Liberals, blindly devoted to Mr. Gladstone. They were not even the most advanced wing of the Liberal Party : the granting of the vote to the rural workers in 1885 came before they had decided to agitate for it. They confined their demands to detailed reforms, in a democratic direction, in the Civil Service and the judiciary. While Radical elements in the Liberal Party were playing with proposals for the State protection of the worker, they continued to oppose, on principle, any interference of any kind in industry. The extension of the principle of the Factory Acts only secured their reluctant support

* Davis I. 69.

when it could be argued that there were especial circumstances justifying the modification of otherwise immutable principles.

The Congress having become a preserve of the Liberal Party, the other great political party made attempts to invade it. From 1878 onwards, peculiar delegates began to appear from small societies to advocate the principles of "Fair Trade" or Protection. It was soon suspected that they were the agents of the Fair Trade League, and paid by it. Their leaders and protectors were Kenney and Kelly, of the dying "General Amalgamated Labourers' Union." In the Congress of 1881, Broadhurst managed to secure the expulsion of a large number of them, on the ground that their expenses were not paid by the bodies that they were said to represent. The Conservative attack had failed, and Broadhurst's group was for the next few years at the height of its power. In 1886 their leader was honoured by being appointed Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, a post whose equal had never before been held by an ex-workman. In 1885 and 1886 he could count eleven of his fellow trade union leaders as members of the Liberal Party in the House of Commons. At another time he was honoured by an invitation to meet the Prince of Wales (King Edward): in an age when sycophancy to the reigning family had not become the rule, he still remarked "I will not pretend that I accepted this offer of Royal Hospitality with anything but the greatest delight. . . . On my arrival, His Royal Highness personally conducted me to my rooms, made a careful inspection to see that all was right, stoked the fires and then, after satisfying himself that all my wants were provided for, withdrew."*

* Broadhurst, 150.

The building trades, once the extreme Left, the most revolutionary wing of the Labour movement, had now become the extreme Right, the most conservative. But the end of Broadhurst's reign was very near. The success of the policy of industrial peace and Liberalism for which his group stood depended upon circumstances entirely outside its control. The fall of Broadhurst was only a part of the fall of Liberalism everywhere. An end had come to the period of British history in which her supremacy was unquestioned, and from the eighties begins the period of conflicting imperialisms, and of struggles for markets and raw materials, the division of Africa and Asia. Textiles were superseded by steel and iron. The Liberal Party was rent by the new Imperialism: the Liberal doctrine was forgotten. As external conflict became sharper, the employers' resistance to the skilled workers' unions hardened. Two national blackleg agencies—forgotten institutions—make their reappearance in the nineties. One of them, run by a person calling himself Graeme Hunter, marked its connection with the new era by its motto "No Union but the Union Jack," and bound each blackleg it sent to forfeit his tools should he refuse to scab.* These were followed at the beginning of the century by Kelly's dangerous "Free Labour Association."

At the same time trade unionism spread to other circles. The small groups of relatively comfortable craftsmen who had accepted the doctrine of industrial peace and parliamentary reform had themselves become restive at the quiescence of the unions in trade matters. Much more was this true of the miners, general labourers, agricultural labourers and others, who were neither

* Higgenbotham. See for Graeme Hunter, Painters' Annual, 1895; Quarterly, June, 1894.

willing nor able to subscribe to what were really expensive friendly societies with dormant trade union rules. Even in 1875 the older building unions were beginning to be dwarfed by larger new unions. The twenty-four thousand masons, a figure regarded as astonishing in the building industry, looked few beside Alexander MacDonald's 140,000 miners or the 100,000 agricultural workers. This wave was followed at the end of the eighties by an even larger, and this time permanent, uprising of the unskilled. With the striking success of the great London Dockers' Strike in 1889, their victory became assured. The leaders of the new unions, conspicuous among whom were John Burns (A.S.E.), Tom Mann (A.S.E.), Ben Tillett (Dockers)—the three organisers of the 1889 victory—and J. Keir Hardie (Ayrshire Miners), called themselves Socialists. To the doctrines of non-intervention and *laissez faire* of the Liberals they opposed a series of collectivist demands for State protection of the workers, including the enactment of a legal eight-hour day. To union organisation based on high subscriptions, high benefits and a policy of peace they opposed unions with low subscriptions, no benefits, and a policy of class war.

This programme first came into public notice when Keir Hardie put it forward at the Trades Union Congress of 1887. Broadhurst crushed him easily with cheerful contempt, but as the opposition grew, the conflict grew more bitter. The new unionism was entirely incomprehensible to the old gang : it seemed treachery. "The attacks came from within," wrote Howell, "more than from without ; from those who ought to be brave defenders, not implacable foes. Some of these men have been braying upon the battlements, calling aloud to the forces outside, for the most part long quiescent, to

resume the conflict. They have done more; they have tried to spike the guns and damp the powder. . . . The distinguishing trait in the conduct of prominent 'new leaders' has been, and is, their persistent, cowardly and calumnious attacks upon the old leaders."* The proposal to establish unions without friendly benefits seemed to the old leaders only evidence of some abominable, unnameable moral perversity. "One cannot help thinking that there is a moral twist in their mental constitution, and an absence of the sense of proportion, or that they have some evil design which they dare not openly propound to their admiring audiences, for fear of utter repudiation."† In the view of the old gang the new unionism was merely a revival of the older unionism which Applegarth had destroyed. Every demand of the new unionists was met with equal condemnation: their antagonism to blacklegs, their demand for further reforms in the picketing and even the libel laws, their proposals for direct employment and Labour Exchanges were coupled with old stories of outrages and violence dug up for the occasion.

The most hotly contested point of the battle, however, was the demand for a legally established eight-hour day, which the old gang opposed blankly as an infringement of liberty.‡ On this question the building unions themselves began to waver. Few of Broadhurst's or Murchie's members could appreciate why Parliament should not be allowed to limit their hours to eight. When, in 1887, the Congress decided to take a ballot on this question, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners voted for Parliamentary action to gain eight

* Howell T.U., 134.

† Howell T.U., p. 103.

‡ Howell T.U., p. 172

hours. The Operative Stonemasons, who had only once before questioned any action of Broadhurst's (a lodge in 1883 thought he should have demanded that museums open on Sunday), agitated the eight-hour question, and in 1889 voted for, so that Broadhurst at that Conference was in the ridiculous position of speaking against and voting for.* The tide was clearly setting against him, and it was decided to make an attempt to drive him and all that he stood for out of power at the Congress of 1889. Fortunately for the old gang, the attack was prefaced by a most unwise campaign of personal slander and insult. Great efforts were made to fasten suspicions of corruption on Broadhurst personally. Such tactics played into his hands, and at the Congress, held in Dundee, his opponents, Keir Hardie and Newstead (London Society of Compositors), were overwhelmed by the reaction. Broadhurst, in a speech which artfully mingled abuse and sentiment, swept the Congress, and from emotion, more than reason, it reaffirmed its confidence in him by 177 votes to eleven.

One speech, however eloquent, does not change the course of history. The victory of the new unionism was only adjourned a year. The next Congress—Liverpool, 1890—passed the complete programme of the new unionists, including the eight-hour day. Forty-five of the sixty resolutions passed, Burns reckoned, were those demanded by the Socialists. Burns and Mann were official delegates from the A.S.E. The Chairman of the Congress was William Matkin, who at that time was in relations with Keir Hardie. Broadhurst resigned his position as Secretary of the Parliamentary Committee on the nominal ground of ill-health. Shipton declared he

* Webb, 408, is an error. See O.S.M. *Returns.*

had been converted to the legal limitation of hours. The victory of 1890 was pressed home in succeeding years, till in 1895 there was no trace left of the Broadhurst domination. His last intervention was in 1894 when he pitted his personal influence against Burns' on the proposal to revise the Congress' constitution, and failed.

The expulsion of the " old unionists " from power was consciously a revolt of the more oppressed against the less. Both in their persons—being well-fed and kept—and in their character as representing wealthy craft unions, the older officials contrasted with the representatives of the suffering unskilled labourers.

" Physically," reported Burns of the 1890 Congress, " the ' old ' unionists were much bigger men than the " ' new,' and that, no doubt, is due to the greater in- " tensity of toil during the last twenty or thirty years. . . . " The ' old ' delegates differed from the ' new ' not only " physically but in dress. A great number of them looked " like respectable city gentlemen ; wore very good " coats, large watch-chains and high hats—and in many " cases were of such splendid build and proportions " that they presented an aldermanic, not to say a " magisterial form and dignity.

" Amongst the ' new ' delegates not a single one wore " a tall hat. They looked workmen. They were work- " men. They were not such sticklers for formality or " Court procedure, but were guided more by common " sense.

" There has been a lot of cant talked about the ' new ' " and ' old ' trades unionism. The difference between " them, if any, is entirely due to the fact that the ' new ' " see that labour-saving machinery is reducing the pre- " viously skilled to the level of unskilled labour, and " they must, in their own interests, be less exclusive than

" hitherto. The ' new ' believe that distinctions of " labour must disappear and that class prejudices that " have disintegrated the Labour movement must be " abolished. Except in tactics, there is no difference " between the ' new ' unionists of to-day and the pion- " eers of unionism of sixty years ago, who, mainly " through the efforts of Robert Owen and others, were " very Socialistic in their principles and action, as is " witnessed by the Engineers' Rules.

" The men who call themselves the ' old ' unionists " to-day, are those who have departed from the genuine " unionism of forty and fifty years ago that never hesi- " tated to invoke State interference and in so doing did " more for the workers than it could secure by trade " union effort."*

This victory was not of long standing or great value. Under Broadhurst the Congress and the Labour movement had for a period at least obeyed some sort of central direction, if a bad and reactionary direction. But the victory of Burns and Mann did not mean that a Liberal executive was supplanted by a Socialist executive. On the contrary, it was the signal for the cessation of all direction ; the Congress became more and more a debating society whose resolutions were purely academic. There were many reasons for this. One was that the Trade Union movement had become so large that to guide it as a whole in any policy, however general, was very difficult. Another was that the running of independent Labour candidates in time transferred some of the most urgent questions to another field. Again, the old unions, though slighted, were not defeated, and an attempt at a militant Socialist policy would have driven them out. As they were still the most

* *A Speech by John Burns on The Liverpool Congress.* London, 1890.

compact, stable and wealthy group, this could not be thought of. Finally, the invaders themselves were by no means a homogeneous body. Their Socialism covered all sorts of contradictory views, from the timidest Fabianism to the most uncompromising revolutionism. Moreover, whatever they might say, the leaders' views were in any case little understood by their followers, who had, as time showed, little enough idea, in general, of Socialism, constitutional or revolutionary. Consequently, the movement scattered and fell into its constituent pieces again. The leaders themselves went various ways: Mr. Tom Mann retained his revolutionary position, Mr. John Burns turned into a Liberal Cabinet Minister, Mr. Ben Tillett became what he is to-day.

At no time did the new movement have much effect upon the building trades. The builders' labourers, its natural material, were organised mostly in general Labour Unions, where many still remain, and they have little separate history. In November, 1889, it is true, the United Builders' Labourers' Union was founded, as a result of a labourer being accidentally killed in a quarrel with a bricklayer. The new society sought the aid of Coulson, who voiced the general belief—"You cannot do it. I myself tried to help Kenney. It is impossible to organise labourers." The society, nevertheless, prospered, and in 1892 passed outside London, but it was at a grave disadvantage compared with the general unions which had lower subscriptions and less formality on entrance, nor did it bring any new Socialist ideas into the trade.* The flicker in the Stonemasons died away; a "Socialist candidate" ran in Scotland for the post of

* Haggerty. There were also undoubtedly numerous local labourers' societies or federations that have left no trace.

Travelling Delegate in 1902, but he was taken as a joke. The Amalgamated Society, in 1892, officially forbade piecework, but this was more a late recognition of accomplished fact than a sign of a fighting policy. For the rest, the building trade unions drew aside and remained aloof from the rest of the Trade Union movement. They modified their principles and methods hardly at all. The ideas of 1860 and 1880 were allowed in this trade to work themselves out to their logical conclusion : extreme conservatism was given the longest possible rope with which to hang itself. Matkin, of the General Union, formed no exception : though he had belonged once to the I.L.P., he soon fell back into a purely craft conservatism, and in 1907 we find him writing rank anti-Socialism :—

" The Socialist resolution carried at the Hull Confer-
" ence appears to have created a considerable amount of
" misgiving as to the future policy of the Labour Party.
" Personally, I think it was bad policy, but I have suffi-
" cient confidence in the Trade Union members already
" elected and the general body of Trade Unionists
" not to allow the movement to be captured or used
" for the purpose of propagating the principles of any
" section of the party other than that for which it was
" established."*

The faults of the old unionism were concealed by the unwonted prosperity of the years 1890 to 1900. Although there was a depression in 1894, the building trades found these years as a whole as good times as the years before 1878. Trade union membership, as always in such times, went steadily upwards : wages were easily protected and advances often granted without a conflict. Under such circumstances, any union, however

* G.U. Annual, 1907.

ill-built, could defend its members. The rank and file were not disposed to be critical. The years were occupied in silent growth; at the end of them the unions were larger and covered fresh areas, but they were not improved in construction, nor in better relations with each other. The members were better satisfied and better paid, but they had little or no conception of the purpose or adequacy of their organisations, and no patience with or interest in proposals of reconstruction or reform. For all their prosperity, these years were for the building trades years of silence and mental stagnation.

In Scotland, a branch of the trade that had been entirely lost was recovered. In 1888 local plasterers' clubs in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen united to form the Scottish National Operative Plasterers' Federal Union. This new union found its central powers jealously circumscribed in the most old-fashioned way. The lodges retained, and still retain, half the subscriptions for administration according to rule; sixpence is sent to head office for all expenses, for funeral and part of the strike benefit. No national strike had ever been conducted by the union until 1922; previous movements had always been local. We find them in 1891* with 22 lodges and 943 members. The next year they adopted a "Form of initiation" at a time when even the Manchester Unity was letting it drop. In 1894 the membership had risen to 1,211, which was not unsatisfactory since there can have been few more than 1,500 plasterers in all Scotland. Soon after, Henry Guthrie, the secretary, embezzled some funds, more through incompetence than intention, and his place was taken by

* S. Plast. B.M., Baird. Most of the older records of Scottish Trade Unionism were lost in the burning of the Albion Hall, Glasgow, some fifteen years ago.

A. Dudgeon, whose views were in consonance with those of his members and strictly confined to the interest of the craft.

Little importance, either, can be attached to the history of the Scottish plumbers. They co-operated with the English society in Scotland, but were too weak to force it to recognise their card in England. Their seat of government still travelled about the country, from Glasgow to Greenock, to Edinburgh and back to Glasgow. By the end of the century they had lodges scattered fairly widely over Scotland, with 1,257 members, and had secured one of their dearest aims in the partial revival of apprenticeship. The sole indication of a conscious interest in anything except immediate craft ends by the members was their support of the Worshipful Company's registration movement.*

So, too, with the Scottish carpenters—the Associated Society. It had spread outside Scotland, having two Irish and twenty-four English branches ; its membership had risen in 1894 to 6,880 in a hundred and thirty-two branches, and in 1899 to 9,787 members in one hundred and seventy-four branches. But no corresponding enlargement had followed in the minds of the members or officials. The necessary and just proposals unofficially made for amalgamation with the A.S.C.J. were treated by the secretary, William McIntyre, with an explosion of hysterical rage that would have done credit to Houseley. All people who suggested this were "traitors" and "shufflers"; he adjured all branches to seek them out and expel them, and concluded by earnestly wishing for the defeat, destruction and dissolution of the more powerful society. "If we should ever think of amalgamation with another society, it will certainly not

* Scottish O.P., 1894-1898.

be with our present wooers."* Nor was this attitude in the least changed until 1902, when McIntyre had to retire through mental derangement and his place was taken by a very different official, Alexander Stark, a quiet and methodical man, who favoured rather than opposed closer union.

The history of the most important Scottish union, the Scottish Operative Masons, was almost more depressing. The membership figures, it is true, at last began to rise again ; from 3,887 in 1891 to 5,690 the next year, and to 8,224 in 1894. In that year there were £6,500 in the bank. By the end of the century, in 1898, there were over twelve thousand members. But they were easy come, easy go. No improvement in the union machinery, no enlargement of the members' ideas, no education of them in the principles of trade unionism can be recorded, and when bad times came the society was shattered. We have noticed that in 1890 the members elected a " travelling delegate," Rennie, to supplement the weakness of John Craig, the secretary. They would have been, nevertheless, astonished to know that Craig had for years ceased to perform his duties at all, and the union had been run by a woman. Age and increasing weakness had prevented Craig from attending to his business, but his small salary could not be lost by the household. His married daughter, Elizabeth Henderson, had done for him all the correspondence, interpretation of rules, and direction of policy, Craig remaining only a figure-head to attend Central Committee meetings. In August, 1895, she was taken from work by the birth of a child. Lest the deceit should be discovered, she rose from bed three days after its birth to prepare Craig's papers for a committee meeting ; the strain was too great and she died.

* Associated Monthly, March, 1895.

Craig made no effort to cope with the work ; he was long past it even if he had not been distressed by the tragedy of his daughter's death. A new election had to be held and, with their usual infelicity, the members selected, by a narrow majority, a candidate whose name, G. B. Craig, led them wrongly to think him a relative of the old man. It would be wrong to ascribe to him opinions either reactionary or advanced ; he was null, and central direction was again absent.* Certain lodges, however, more or less on their own initiative, did well enough. The Edinburgh Lodge, moreover, created a sensation in 1897 by striking for the unheard-of privilege of an eight-hour day. Nine was the shortest that had been practicable before, but the Lodge members hung on until they got it. They found, however, that as the other building trades could not follow them they did not start later or knock off earlier ; in fact, they but lost an hour's pay by the new arrangement. Within the fortnight they had abandoned it.†

In England the story is much the same. If we take first the painting trade, we find that the London Society in these years at last rose from complete insignificance, counting 3,055 members in 1891 and 5,165 in 1900. It had no internal history worth the recording. We may observe that in 1900 it imitated Prior's ruthlessness on a

* S.O.M. *Returns*, August, October, 1895 ; Annuals, 1894, 1898.

† The history of the separate Aberdeen Union can be given in a few words. It voted against Eight Hours in 1889, in 1892 adopted a "Benevolent Fund," but dropped it again, and in 1895 was able to appoint its first full-time secretary. It made a vain attempt to extend its boundaries in 1893. It is interesting to note that although it was in itself an instance of extreme craft subdivision (Aberdeen is an isolated section of Scotland where monumental and other work on granite is carried on), it carried out the same principle internally. Aberdeen was divided into four lodges, Aberdeen Monumental, Aberdeen Building, Aberdeen Toolsmiths, Aberdeen Polishers : not local divisions, but divisions by function.

small scale. The East London Painters' Union, a society of ship-painters, made an unwise attempt to drive Amalgamated members off ship-painting altogether, striking against their members in various places. The Amalgamated replied by entering into an alliance with the employers, who detested the East London Union. The East London men were locked out, a Joint Committee between the employers and the Amalgamated was formed, which issued advertisements offering the jobs to painters. The Amalgamated filled as many as it could, but for the most part the new men were non-unionists. The East London Union was smashed and its members taken into the Amalgamated.*

The National Amalgamated (Manchester) also rose from 1,863 members in 1888 to 4,140 in 1891, 6,528 in 1894, and over ten thousand at the end of the century. But there was little other progress to record. A proposal was drafted for amalgamation with the London Society, but its terms were such that the London men regarded it as a proposal for absorption, and rejected it. The relations between the Executive and General Councils remained bad ; in 1892, for example, a General Council member secured the exclusion of Miss Beatrice Potter† from a sitting that she was going to attend, on the ground that the behaviour of the E.C. was to be discussed and the language that he wished to use would be impossible in the presence of a lady. In 1894 the treasurer of the Society, who had been drinking heavily for months, died suddenly, leaving a deficit of £113 : in the same year maladministration was discovered in many

* L.P. Annual, 1900 ; Monthly, May, July, 1900. The Universal Federation of Painters, a Bermondsey club with twenty members, was absorbed at the same time.

† Mrs. Sidney Webb, then collecting materials for the *History of Trade Unionism.*

branches. " The revelations which have been brought to light," wrote George Sunley, the General Secretary, " are astounding. One B.S. [branch secretary] had never paid any contributions for years and actually sat on the E.C. long after he had ceased to be a member. Another branch had been so badly conducted that a large number of members, including the B.S., were over 26 weeks in arrears, their names still being retained on the books. In others members have been paid benefits who were not entitled to receive the same."* The Government itself, it appeared, had a more elevated idea of the importance of the Society than the members : it made Sunley a J.P. in 1892, when the members were discussing and refusing an appeal by him to have his wages raised from 40s. to £2 10s. a week. Some activity was shown in enrolling the numerous local societies. A particularly tough adversary was the Belfast society, and the Amalgamated members were led into very questionable methods of attack, as a result of which Sunley was expelled from the Trades Union Congress of 1896. Twenty-six local societies with 5,000 members remained unabsorbed by 1898.

The English Slaters' Society (A.S.T.P.S.) in this period began to emerge from obscurity, slowly snapping up the local societies which had held aloof. Some of these brought large accessions of strength—notably Leeds (1893), Belfast (1896), and Manchester (1901). The same society showed what energy could do in a good period by its campaign against the almost universal evil of piecework, which it started in 1894. In 1896 it had excluded it from all the main centres, and although it was not extinguished till 1912, its back was broken in these years.†

* Painters' Annual, 1894.

† Wilson.

In the larger English unions certain characteristics began to appear that marked building unions for the next ten years. These were not the result of conscious choice or direction, but of hazard, of the absence of direction. The unions were left to themselves : their development and policy was the result of chance or, at the best, the greatest common measure of the whims of innumerable lodges.

The most serious event of these years was the gradual decay of the lodges. At the beginning the lodge had been everything, the centre nothing. The full development of Applegarth's principles, consequent upon the changes in industrial life, was making the centre everything, the lodge nothing. Branches had lost one by one their privileges, which for greater efficiency had been transferred to the centre. In this period thay had lost all except the administration of friendly benefits, which alone kept them alive. Most branches tried pathetically to keep up a small " contingent " fund, to do they knew not quite what with, but their *raison d'être* was disappearing. They grew less and less important until the passing of the Insurance Act gave another blow to local life. As a result, the interest of the rank and file in the union flagged : the percentage that attended branch meetings was, and is, very low, and in times of crisis the hold of the union on the members became correspondingly weak. This process is not yet finished ; for any organisation or body which has no function to perform must in time wither away: unless some function is found for them, branches will remain shadows.

Practically no attempt was made in these years to level up the lower-paid areas. It is within the power of any national building union to pull up backward areas to a

general level by strikes: it is in national action that it is relatively weak as compared, say, with a transport union. But this easier task was utterly neglected.*

The question of admittance to the trade solved itself in this period more by accident than design.† The masons retained their system of apprenticeship, on the whole, though the decline of the craft meant in effect that few apprentices were entered or accepted who were not sons of working masons. Hence, masonry for a time seemed to be becoming a hereditary craft. This

* Figures showing the great variety in the three strongest unions are given in S. Webb and H. Cox, *The Eight Hours Day*, 1891, p. 91. The figures refer to 1888. At the same period plumbers' rates (O.P.Q.R., December, 1888) varied from 5*d.* an hour (Derry) to 10½*d.* (London).

No. of Towns	*Hours*	*Highest Wages*	*Lowest Wages*
	Operative Bricklayers Society		
14	57½ or more	£1 16 10½	£1 4 9½
59	56½	2 2 4½	1 5 10
12	54½—56	2 1 7½	1 5 0
16	54	1 16 0	1 9 3
6	50 or less	1 15 0½	1 11 3
	Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners		
19	58½ or more	£1 16 0	£1 0 0
94	56½	2 2 4½	1 6 0
32	55—55½	2 1 7½	1 5 5
64	54	1 19 0	1 4 9
16	51½—53	1 15 0	1 6 6
17	50	1 13 4	1 7 1
12	49½	1 10 11½	1 8 0
	Operative Stonemasons		
7	57—58½	£1 16 6½	£1 8 10½
38	56½	2 0 0	1 13 1½
29	54	1 18 3	1 13 4
16	51—53½	1 19 0	1 12 7
12	50	1 16 0	1 12 2½
46	49½	1 17 1½	1 12 7
19	48½—49	1 16 4½	1 13 5

† See a discussion of the whole question in 1897 in Webb, I.D. II., 466 onwards.

continued till about fifteen years ago, when the obvious decline of the craft caused the stream of apprentices to dry up, and the system is now practically extinct. The Scottish plasterers enforced, and enforce, the binding of apprentices; the English did not. The plumbers made great efforts to retain the apprenticeship system, with only partial success; nevertheless, as has been pointed out, plumbers are mainly recruited from plumbers' mates and are not in danger of being swamped by the unskilled. The claim of the painters to enforce apprenticeship, on the other hand, failed utterly, and the craft continued to be invaded by unskilled labour of every kind.* Although apprenticeship declined also in bricklaying, the unions were strong enough to prevent any large incursion of general labourers; the craft was recruited mostly from builders' labourers.

In this decade, also, the building trade unions became deeply involved in the craft inter-union disputes which were afterwards for some their main activity. The pugnacity which the members were not allowed to exercise against their employers they seemed to turn against their fellow workers.† Crafts which extended into other industries, such as painting, plumbing and carpentry, offered the best field for this poisonous growth. The weakness of the painters' unions prevented them from cultivating it to maturity, although they were involved in a serious Tyneside dispute with shipyard labourers in 1894. But the plumbers excelled all others in their enthusiasm for craft quarrels: Cherry,

* "Labourers, sailors, fishermen and broken-down gentlemen's servants."—Painters' Quarterly, March, 1896.

† One single craft quarrel between bricklayers and plasterers at Newcastle cost the latter union several thousand pounds.—Lamb.

the secretary, although he partly shared the members' prejudices, had to threaten in 1893 that he "would not consent to Lodges rushing into disputes." The society was growing; it rose from 3,749 members in 1888 to over ten thousand in 1900. But it was not strong enough to fight all the enemies it provoked. In 1891 it tried to fight the A.S.E. on the Clyde over some question of pipe-fitting; the next year it struck against members of the A.S.C.J. fitting lead on to window-sills. From then onwards the quarrels are too numerous to record. Two whole classes of workers were taken by the plumbers as natural enemies—zincworkers (a general category of workers now obsolete through changes in production) and hot-water and gas-fitters. The last class the union pretended should not exist; its claim was, indeed, that no such people did exist, and it seriously attempted over a period of twenty years to drive them off every job they attempted. George Cherry, wiser than his members, proposed twice in two years (1891, 1893) to admit this new class to the union, but without success.* The attitude of the plumbers forced the formation of a counter-union (Heating and Domestic Engineers), formed as much for resisting the oppression of the plumbers as of the employers. When they were not disputing with other societies, the two plumbers' unions quarrelled with each other. In 1896, indeed, they actually brought their disputes into court, and the Scottish society secured a fine of £10 from the English association.† Fierce to rival unions, the Association was mild to the employers; it gratefully received advances suggesting a board of conciliation in 1896, and expressed its belief that all strikes would be avoided. At the same

* O.P.Q.R., December, 1893; O.P.D.M., 1891.

† Macfarlane case, O.P.Q.R., March, 1896.

time it agreed to support a Bill making the taking of the degree of "R.P." compulsory. A small improvement in union machinery was agreed to in 1900, with the institution of a "General Council" of the usual kind, but when Cherry died in 1902* the union, though larger in size, was in essentials the same as when he entered office twenty-three years before.

Similar is the history of the joiners' unions. The Amalgamated rose from twenty-six thousand members to the magnificent, unequalled total of over sixty-five thousand in 1900. The General Union rose from fifteen hundred to nine thousand. The latter never recovered its old position, and was still oppressed and held down wherever possible by the "dog-in-the-manger policy" of the Amalgamated.† That it revived at all is surprising. The reason, as amiably advanced by Amalgamated officials, was that it was a refuge for blacklegs who took advantage of its loose organisation and low subscriptions to join it when hunted out by Amalgamated men, only to run out again as soon as their backs were turned. The truth was that Matkin's first act had been to introduce a "trade section which as worked most satisfactory."‡ There were many carpenters and joiners who belonged to friendly societies already, or had not the provident temperament. The Amalgamated made no provision for them, and the General Union was their refuge. It was true they did not form a stable membership, but they came in as fast as they went out. So it was that the General Union returned from the dead. Like some of the lower forms of organic life, it was of low vitality, but persistent. It

* At the age of 52. O.P.Q.R., September, 1902.
† G.U. Annual, 1892.
‡ G.U. Annual, 1903.

would not develop and was very difficult to kill, and the Amalgamated, to its great annoyance, was followed about by it like a shadow wherever it went.

The growth of the Amalgamated was an even more senseless growth than that of other unions. Branches were opened, by emigration, throughout the British Empire and America, and in this period, such was the hold of the Society on its members, the foreign membership became considerable. Nevertheless, not until the year 1922 was any serious attempt made to handle this membership in a rational manner ; on the contrary, the Society repeated and exaggerated the mistake of George III. and attempted to rule Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, and the United States from Brunswick Street in Manchester. The Society was involved in one craft quarrel of extreme violence, which deserves mention though outside the building industry. In 1890 the Amalgamated became involved in a demarcation quarrel with the shipwrights, and the whole of the North-East Coast was held up for months by their disputes as to who should do a particular job. The stoppage was arbitrated in the end by Thomas Burt, the M.P., but, as in other cases, it was clear that war might be resumed any minute. Chandler believed this to be unavoidable : " When men are not organised," he remarked, " these little things are not taken much notice of, but the moment the two trades become well organised, each trade is looking after its own particular members' interests."*

Only one other event is worthy of record—the London lock-out of 1891. Three shops were struck by the Amalgamated for an advance in May of that year, and

* Webb, 354. See also Webb I.D. II. 510. In 1890-93, in thirty-five months, thirty-five weeks were idle through craft quarrels.

the Central Master Builders' Association replied by a lock-out. Both sides were obstinate, but after twenty-six weeks the arbitration of the Royal Institute of Architects was accepted, and a partial victory secured. This was at once followed by applications from the other building craft unions, which the master builders, now once beaten, granted without a struggle. This result in itself showed how far the building crafts were now interdependent. More than that, this lock-out, unimportant in itself, is noteworthy as the last occasion on which a sectional union directed a trade movement of any importance alone. This was the last occasion on which the craft unionism of 1860 showed itself of any trade value, but thirty years later the lesson had not been drawn by the members of the unions.*

Proposals and machinery intended to decrease the conflicts between unions and make the industry more capable of fighting the masters were treated with little courtesy. The London Building Trades Federation was founded in 1893 and successfully directed an advance movement in 1895. Local building trade federations appeared in the provinces also, at various dates.† But they were treated with the greatest coldness, and even hostility, by the Central Offices of the larger unions. Branches were not encouraged to join, or withdrawn, as in the case of the O.B.S., upon trivial pretexts. No notice was taken of the federations, or

* O.B.S. Annual, 1919. There is a survey of building trade unions in 1892 in Webb, 432, which should be read. In a few particulars it needs correction. The Plumbers' Association is not a descendent of the O.P.G. of 1831, there was a break of sixteen years without a national union. The O.S.M. was founded in 1833, not 1832. The Manchester Unity (U.O.B.T.A.A.B.S.) was founded in 1829, not 1832. The constitution of the O.B.U. was not preserved by the plumbers.

† G.U. Annual, 1892.

attention paid to their decisions. The weaker unions, like the Manchester Painters or the General Union of Carpenters, encouraged their branches to join them in the hope of securing the support of the larger unions, but the greater societies obstinately refused to attach any importance to them. Indeed, not the London operatives but the London master builders were most responsible for the formation even of the London Federation. In 1892 they wished to tie the whole of the London operatives by a general agreement, and for that purpose themselves took the trouble of collecting their representatives and bringing them together.*

The same treatment was meted out to proposals for a general Federation of Trade Unions which forced their way from the outside world into the building trades at this period. This scheme was connected with the new Socialist leaders who had captured the Trades Union Congress, and the building trade officials showed no enthusiasm for it. The agitation was carried chiefly by a group running the *Clarion*, which had drafted an elaborate and advanced scheme. The rank and file, even in the building trades, showed considerable interest, and in 1897 the Trades Union Congress took the matter up and produced a plan of its own. Both these, the *Clarion* and the T.U.C. plans, were submitted to the vote of the unions, but the comments with which they were sent out from headquarters destroyed any opportunity of success. Eventually, when the G.F.T.U. was floated, one building union alone, the small London Painters, joined it.† The A.S.C.J. voted "in principle"

* Henshaw.

† See Chandler, 77, for a piece of characteristic writing, and Higgenbotham for an analysis of the two schemes. The Plasterers joined in 1902, Painters 1905, U.B.L.U. 1902.

for a federation, but the Executive took no action. The Stonemasons felt they would have preferred the *Clarion* scheme, and the other societies adopted some excuse or other.

The Stonemasons had, during this period, considered the alternative proposal of a federation for the building trade only. It was suggested by a lodge that the carpenters', bricklayers', plasterers', and plumbers' societies be approached, but the proposal was rejected with horror. "Why, worthy brothers," exclaimed one lodge, "it would cost a hundred pounds to have a Federation!" They rejected with equal firmness a second proposal to join the *local* building trade federations, estimated in 1895 to number twenty-five. Another evidence of the members' narrow-mindedness was their treatment of Williams, the Assistant-General Secretary. He applied for a rise of six shillings on his weekly wage of forty-five shillings and was refused, not, as the lodge opposing explained, because they could not afford it, but because they wished officials to be poorly paid. An even gloomier presage was the low attendance at lodges and the ever less percentage of voters. Resolutions of the gravest importance were carried by smaller and smaller votes, though the figures of membership rose from just over ten thousand in 1889 to nearly twenty thousand in 1899. It is, therefore, very doubtful how far any enlightened resolutions that were carried are to be taken seriously. We may be quite sure that the instruction to the delegate to the 1894 Trades Union Congress, to move "that the Government do take over all means of production, distribution and exchange," did not represent the real feeling of the members. The levy, afterwards abandoned, for the Labour Representation Committee in 1896 was accompanied by a present to

Broadhurst which may have reconciled it to the members, but neither in this case nor in the addition of nationally elected members to the Executive in 1891 is it safe to assume conscious choice by the rank and file.

The history of the two bricklayers' societies is gloomy. John Batchelor, at the head offices of the London O.B.S., had more advanced ideas upon the subject of amalgamation and federation than his members : G. H. Clarke shared the worst prejudices of the Manchester Unity. The extreme conservatism of the latter body prevented it from reaping the advantage of the good years : while the London Order rose from 8,189 members in 1889 to 17,058 in 1891 and 36,491 in 1899, the Manchester Order had 1,665 members in 1891 and had only risen to 3,169 in 1899. The London Order declared truly in 1892 that " the time has come for amalgamation," and addressed proposals to Manchester, but its acts did little to assist it. Whole towns in which the Manchester Order had held a feeble sway were being " poached " by the London Order at the time when it sent out the invitation, and Clarke killed the scheme at its inception by an unscrupulous manipulation of figures. In rivalry with the London Order he started a sick fund, accepted by the members on the almost childish ground that the initiation litany said :—

> " Blest are the men of every kind,
> " That do unite with willing mind,
> " To help each other in distress,
> " When sick or rendered comfortless."

The first years of the nineties were years of unequal struggle, in which the London Order was the stronger, the Manchester Order the more malignant. In Ireland the Manchester Order was still the strongest, and Belfast

Lodge, with the approval of Clarke, attempted to drive all London men out of the trade, or to force them to join Manchester, paying 25s. for the privilege. "Of course the Council would not for one moment entertain the Amalgamation of the two societies into one," wrote Clarke to Belfast in 1895, and next year, hearing that a Belfast member had spoken in favour of amalgamation, sent instructions to have him driven out.* With difficulty Batchelor patched up a working agreement in 1895, only to be disavowed by his own Executive, and to see Clarke exhort all his members to a jehad against "the low and despicable" London Order. In Belfast, however, the Manchester bricklayers reaped as they sowed: the powerful Belfast Lodge found fining the London Order members so profitable that it treated the members of its own society the same way, and broke away at the end of 1896 to form a close society to exclude Manchester and London alike.

When not fighting each other the two Orders fought other building unions. Manchester quarrelled with the Stonemasons in 1895, and in 1896 both Orders started on a serious and prolonged struggle with the Plasterers, over the right to lay floors and fix tiles. Though Batchelor remarked at the height of the quarrel "There should be but one union for the building trade—at least among the constructional trades" (plastering, bricklaying and stonemasonry), his society voted that no other craft should be allowed to do any tiling,† and his remarks were regarded by the others as either hypocritical or dilettante. The Plasterers regarded the London Order as attempting to "annex a portion of

* Unity Reports, March, September, 1892; September, 1895; January, June, December, 1896.

† O.B.S. Annuals, 1898, 1899.

our craft," and spurred their members on to the battle with the comment : " The O.B.S. still continue to play into the hands of the Master Builders' Association." The quarrel was not patched up until 1900, when the combatants hurriedly came together to keep out a new more dangerous rival, the concreter.*

To the general stupor there was one partial exception —the craft of plastering. Martin Deller's election (1896) had given the National Association a secretary whom it was prepared to trust. He had sufficient personality to dominate his executive and to impose upon the Society a regular and ordered policy. He was not paralysed, like so many other officials, by an office tradition which was rapidly going out of date. His ideas were not, indeed, advanced when compared with the ferment of thought outside, but for the building trade they were well enough. A revival of a conscious fighting policy, discouragement of the craft spirit and assistance for the labourers, endorsement of federation and politically the support of a Labour Party—these were insufficient as a whole philosophy, no doubt, but they came like fresh air into the building trades. The support which Deller received from his members showed that they only waited for a lead. The membership figures rose from 1,470 in 1887 to 7,677 in 1893, and just over eleven thousand in 1900, nor was the new membership altogether lost again in the bad years. Deller had the defects of his qualities. " I have the reputation of being somewhat of a fighter," he wrote, but to his assistants he seemed also somewhat of a tyrant. His first year in the office was marked by an explosion in the old style with the Assistant Secretary, John Lamb, who called him " a bully and a sweater," and in the end retired because of

* Plast. Annual, 1897.

his behaviour. He was also undoubtedly conceited. So, too, his large free and easy manner had its ridiculous side: at one time a Lodge asked for a fine-book and the offices are to-day still cluttered up with rotting fine-books ordered by Deller at the time, because he could not be bothered with an order less than several thousand. But the same impulse led him to arrange, with admirable good sense, for a special edition of the Webbs' two books* for his members in 1898—the only official who had the alertness to do so. He alone approved of the schemes of federation, and pressed them on his members. The A.S.E. lock-out of 1897, he pointed out, showed clearly the necessity of some such scheme as the *Clarion* one, especially as in the building trade "we are now threatened with a combination of employers which will equal the power of the Employers' Federation who set out to crush the A.S.E."† His union agreed to the *Clarion* plan and held aloof when the Trades Union Congress ignored it, but later, in 1902, joined the G.F.T.U. He advocated the admission of granolithic workers to the union, but was outvoted.‡ His opposition to the narrow craft spirit was shown further in his attitude to the labourers: "We do recognise that our labourers are men,"§ he said proudly, and replied to the Stonemasons that his union would consider no scheme of federation that excluded the unskilled.

Politically, he did his best to lead his members to defend themselves there as well as on the industrial field. He first jeered at the sham which the Trades Union Congress and its Parliamentary Committee had become:

* *History of Trade Unionism* and *Industrial Democracy.*

† Plast. Annual, 1897.

‡ 1898 Conference.

§ Plast. Monthly, May, 1897.

" The T.U.C. might as well be dead," he said, its resolutions were empty and it only provided an excuse for a week's holiday. He advised his members to turn to the Labour Representation Committee and try and get elected on to local authorities. In 1902 he told them bluntly : " We want neither Liberal nor Tory : what we do want is a good, strong and pure Labour Party. . . . Eschew both the old Parties as you would Hellfire." When he had to counsel care and conciliation, he did not do so as part of a Liberal policy of industrial peace, but openly as a momentary strategy. In 1901 he urged the branches to go slow and use " cunning instead of plain and open arguments. I detest these tactics, but as we cannot meet our foes under any other condition, am prepared to adopt them."*

At the end of the century the impending attack upon the unions by the employers was heralded by a smaller struggle, as it were by scouts sent out before. It was unfortunate for the employers that they selected the Plasterers' Association as the body for the experiment. The Master Builders' Association in March, 1899, locked out all plasterers in England. The alleged grievances were strikes against blacklegs, against non-union foremen, and disputes between bricklayers and plasterers; in fact the struggle was a trial of strength. Deller stated, in a letter to the master builders, his conviction " that nothing but a fight would appease your desire for annihilation," and added with refreshing candour that if they had signed an agreement he knew they were too dishonest to keep it. Considerable but ill-directed efforts were made to break the operatives. Lord Wemyss, who had been having his house repaired and knew all about it, wrote to the *Times* to warn the men that all plasterers

* Plast. Annual, 1901, 1902, 1899.

would soon be superseded by " truly artistic Japanese woodworkers," whose pay was sevenpence a day, on which " they manage to live and thrive, though their food consists only of rice daily and two or three times a week the heads and tails of fish ; they cannot afford to buy the bodies also." The master builders were foolish enough to reprint this stuff with approving comments, adding that " the so-called master has for years provided the brains and capital, only to be robbed and plundered by the ever-recurring restrictions and octopus clinging tentacles of the N.A.O.P."* They also imported Italian blacklegs. Such tactics rallied all the unions behind the National Association of Operative Plasterers. " If the M.B.A. defeat the Plasterers their next victims are Plumbers," wrote G. B. Cherry, and the small London Painters, on receiving a letter from the Master Builders' Association requiring an assurance that they had no sympathy with, nor would give support to, the plasterers, acknowledged it by sending a cheque for £20 to Deller. The master builders were threatening a general lock-out, and in consequence the A.S.C.J. took the step of calling together delegates of all the building trade unions. A meeting was held in Birmingham in April, and, to the great astonishment of all concerned, all the unions except the Stonemasons were represented, constituting a gathering such as had not been seen in the memory of living man. The conference adjourned for the moment, but met again in Manchester in May on the Yorkshire Master Builders' proclaiming a general lock-out. All the most important officials, Deller, Tyson Wilson, George Cherry, G. H. Clarke, William Matkin, John Batchelor, were present. The proceedings were marred by occasional quarrels, but they were on the

* Plast. Various.

whole so unanimous that the delegates, surprised at their own audacity, discussed (though without result) the possibility of a Building Trades Federation, and appointed a Committee to report upon a Board of Conciliation. The unexpected solidarity of the unions, meanwhile, had scared the Master Builders, who in June withdrew the lock-out without gaining their objects. The proposed Conciliation Board the employers killed by making deliberately impossible demands for deposits of money, knowing that bad times were ahead, the unions' strength would be diminished and the need, from their point of view, of conciliation would be less.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DEAD HAND

BAD TRADE * UNIONS DECLINE * UNABLE TO PROTECT MEMBERS * NEW PROCESSES * CO-OPERATIVE PRODUCTION * LABOUR REPRESENTATION * FOREIGN MEMBERSHIP * CRAFT CONFLICTS * PLUMBERS' PRE-EMINENCE * CONCILIATION * PAINTERS AMALGAMATE * BUILDERS' LABOURERS FAIL TO DO SO * THE DEAD HAND * CARPENTERS AND JOINERS FAIL * BRICKLAYERS FAIL * "CONSTRUCTIONAL BRANCHES AMALGAMATION" FAILS * DEPRESSION *

ROBERT TRESSALL

1900–1910

SUCH conservatism, such an obstinate refusal to overhaul union machinery and place it in working order, might have no immediate ill-effects in good times, but in the hard times that were to come it brought great suffering and wretchedness to many of the rank and file, who found themselves half defenceless. The building boom ended in 1901, and trade contracted sharply and did not recover (and then only in part) for ten years. Wage cuts were enforced; almost every union submitted to some deterioration, either of conditions or pay, and the disorganisation of the union machinery permitted the Master Builders' Associations to select their time and place for their attacks, with the result that the burden of the bad trade was almost entirely shifted on to the operatives.

The unions suffered in varying degrees from the storm. The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and

Joiners, which had over seventy thousand members at the end of the boom, lost ten thousand of these, and its funds wasted from £210,000 to £84,000. The General Union fell from over nine thousand members in 1900 down again to 5,200 in 1908. The Associated, the Scottish society, suffered even more ; its membership, which had been as high as the General Union's, fell below four thousand in 1910. The Plasterers' membership fell from eleven thousand to 6,300, though the Plumbers' membership, oddly enough, remained almost fixed at 11,400. The Manchester Unity, having passed 3,000 members, collapsed again to 1,557, the London Order of Bricklayers fell from thirty-eight thousand to twenty-three thousand, and other unions suffered similarly. In Scotland, the premier union, the Scottish United Stonemasons, was nearly extinguished. The faults of the archaic constitution that it had preserved were mainly responsible. Glasgow being the seat of government, the Central Committee, uncontrolled by any General Council, was selected exclusively by and from the Glasgow lodges, and directed the Society's affairs in the interests of Glasgow. G. B. Craig, the secretary, was far too weak a man to check them, and in 1904 they permitted Glasgow to strike against a reduction from 9½d. an hour to 9d. Not only was this most unwise, but it was unconstitutional, since the necessary vote from the Association had not been secured. It was a piece of pure favouritism. The Committee ignored protests, poured out the money of the union in support of Glasgow until it was exhausted, and then closed the strike in defeat. Conditions were terrible, everywhere " unemployment, aye, even for months on end," but even worse was the complete loss of confidence in the Society. From eleven thousand the membership fell to

five hundred. For practical purposes the Society passed out of existence, as it had done sixty years before. Craig made no attempt even to transact the Society's business: he issued, indeed, a fortnightly letter and drew his wages, but did not even try to pull the union together, but sat in idle despair. Some members, of the few remaining, were so depressed that they discussed abandoning the Society and its debts altogether, and inviting in the English masons to organise Scotland. This plan, however, was abandoned, but the Society did not recover.*

More serious than the straightforward decline of the unions was their utter inability to protect their members' standard of life. The Plasterers were forced "to watch men competing against one another in taking piecework for labour only,"† and an observer in 1908 remarked that with the exception of the plumbing craft in certain towns, the apprenticeship regulations had been utterly swept away in the building trades.‡ The disastrous conditions were accentuated by the introduction of new processes and machinery on a large scale. These had, of course, existed before—the beginnings of steel construction, for example, date from 1850—but only in these years did their use expand rapidly and throw numbers out of employment. Foreign importation of joinery at one time also threatened to become a danger, but greenness and the poor quality of the work (it is alleged) prevented this growing to any size.

* S.O.M. Annuals, 1904, 1905. One Scottish Society marked real progress. The Amalgamated Slaters had already secured, by 1897, a levelling-up of the lower-paid areas. In 1903 friendly benefits were instituted, and added to in 1912, under the Insurance Act. In 1903, also, the first full-time General Secretary, William Cross, was elected, and the Society's growth since then has been steady. No change was made by the Plasterers.

† *i.e.*, not even providing own materials. Plasterers' Annual, 1910.

‡ Dearle

Large and small unions alike were helpless before these changes. They had not been provided for in the constitution of the societies, and the necessary changes in policy seemed to be out of the power of the conservative membership. In the joinery trade it was the introduction of machine joinery works that most injured working rules and conditions, and none of the three unions were able effectively to grapple with it. William Matkin, the secretary of the General Union, wrote in 1905 :—

"A large quantity of Joiners' work is being manufactured under worse conditions than has existed during the past 40 years. You will have gathered from our Organisers' Reports that these machine joinery works are now established in almost every district they have visited, and about the only places in which work appeared to be brisk, and with the exception of two or three leading hands and machinists, the remainder are underpriced men and youths with no recognised working rules or standard rate of wages. With trade drifting in this direction, and the substitution of iron and concrete and other materials in place of wood in the construction of buildings accounts to a large extent for the number of unemployed."*

But the most important change in this period was, of course, the great extension of the use of concrete.† Although it was still not much used for private houses, it replaced masonry and brickwork in the vast majority of important jobs. The larger buildings, hospitals, hotels and such, which would previously have been put up in stone and brick, were almost always put up by the ferro-concrete process. Masonry, and, to a less extent,

* G.U. Annual, 1905.

† See Dearle, 43-47.

bricklaying, lost all the large jobs and had to exist upon the lesser stonework and stone-cutting for which concrete was still unsuitable. Rough carpentry was also affected, and some plumbers' work lost by the substitution of asphalt concrete for lead on roofs.* Masonry and possibly bricklaying could be classed with coach-making among the dying industries. At the same time the societies were unable to exclude entirely American speeding-up methods, which were first practised on a large scale in the erection of the Westinghouse buildings at Trafford Park in 1902. Plumbers were affected gravely by the introduction of electric light, which took from them altogether ground that they had partly lost to the gasfitter, by the replacing of lead by iron piping, and most of all by the large increase in the use of Doulton's and similar manufactured earthenware for sanitary purposes. Plasterers were injured, though to a relatively trifling degree, by the introduction of fibrous manufactured plaster slabs ; the disuse of cement and sand (" compo ") for the outsides of houses affected them much more.

The only attempt made to meet the new difficulties was a revival of the old schemes of co-operative production. Both societies of painters had branches that started shortlived Co-operative Painters' Societies, while the A.S.C.J. embarked on a much more elaborate scheme of general building called " Amalgamated Builders, Ltd.," which ran with apparent success between 1901 and 1904. The capital was subscribed by members of the A.S.C.J., but in insufficient quantities, and the company was wound up in 1906, having lost the members something under six thousand pounds. Inexperienced management, and in one case even

* Dearle, 48.

jerry-work had something to do with the failure, but the main reason was the absence of any system of "costing." Estimates were given recklessly and money locked up in enterprises far too large for the small capital possessed. It was also observed that some members took advantage of their position to work very slowly.* Of other societies we may mention the Plumbers', whose main policy and preoccupation during this period of great difficulty and change was a fear that the registration scheme of the Worshipful Company might be superseded by one drafted by the Institute of Plumbers. It was remarked that they seemed more interested in the reign of King Edward III. than that of King Edward VII.†

It is true that every building trades union at one time or other levied itself on behalf of the Labour Representation Committee, though few did so steadily throughout this period. Most, even the Manchester Unity, contemplated running candidates, and W. Tyson Wilson, a member of the A.S.C.J., captured West Houghton in 1906. The reason for this was not an enlargement of the members' political ideas, but the Taff Vale decision at the beginning of the century. This made a Trade Union liable for the acts of any of its agents during a strike or lock-out, with the result that employers could charge up to a union the whole of their loss. The Yorkshire Miners' Association, for example, was fined £150,000 under this interpretation. It was clear even to the most obtuse Trade Unionist that this iniquitous piece of judge-made law rendered every union helpless, and that it could only be reversed by political action. Trade Unionists consequently were run for Parliament through the available machinery, the

* Higgenbotham.

† O.P.Q.R., June, 1906 ; August, 1907 ; January, April, 1909.

Labour Representation Committee, even though it was tainted with Socialism. But the candidates selected were not required to agree to any general programme on behalf of the workers ; the reversal of the Taff Vale decision and such odd pickings as could be secured from the Government for their members were all that were asked of them. Like railway directors who are in Parliament primarily to push the interests of the company, they were to go to Westminster to push the interests of their union. Thus they were not concerned with the defence of the working-class as a whole, nor did they belong to the more advanced circles even of building trade unions. They were mostly Liberals at heart, of the Broadhurst type, and most conservative even in union politics. Tyson Wilson, for example, made great efforts to prevent the necessary and useful amalgamation between the Associated and Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners. Inside the L.R.C., and later the Labour Party, the weight of the building unions was thrown heavily against all Socialist proposals and Socialist candidates. In 1902 the A.S.C.J. delegate gravely told the Trades Union Congress " we shall no longer allow the tail to wag the dog ; we shall wag our own tails." Batchelor lamented that the L.R.C. had been established at all, and suggested that the union act without it. The Plasterers warningly said " Socialistic organisations should abstain from endeavouring to paint the Labour Party with a colour" that it did not appreciate. Matkin's opinion has already been quoted ; the Manchester Unity and the Associated Carpenters actually withdrew because of " the Socialist adventurers hanging on."*

* It will be remembered that the L.R.C. secured the return of 29 candidates in 1906, who, together with certain "Lib.-Lab." M.P.s, formed the Labour Party, which secured the reversal of the Taff Vale Judgment.

Little regard was shown in the enrolment of members to the efficiency or purpose of the unions. Executives often extended their areas of operation without inquiring whether the new members represented an accession of strength or merely new liabilities. So many more names on the roll, so many more lodges, gratified their sense of importance, and few members stopped to consider the value of these new accessions. The United Operative Plumbers in 1905 solemnly amalgamated with the Cape Town Plumbers' Association, whose members were, in theory at least, henceforward governed by an Executive drawn from the twelve-mile radius in London.* The Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners, in 1904, made an antiquated machine more cumbrous by adding to the General Council members representing and residing in Canada and South Africa. In 1903 it engaged in a fierce struggle in America with the native United Brotherhood of Carpenters, which fought it from town to town in vain. The quarrels were long-standing, but the violence of this outbreak led to an attempt at arbitration by Adolf Strasser, of the Cigar Makers' Union, a colleague of Samuel Gompers. His terms were rejected by the American society and the war recommenced, and in 1910 Chandler was still writing thinly-veiled exhortations to his members to fight the Brotherhood.†

Inter-union quarrelling, which had begun well in the last decade, increased enormously. Unions fought, not merely with their rivals in the same craft, but with every other craft. The Stonemasons and the London Order of Bricklayers had a serious conflict at Llandudno in

* O.P.Q.R., March, 1905.

† Chandler, 81. It should be added that the Brotherhood was, and I believe is, one of the most repulsive examples of American reactionary craft unionism.

1901. The Manchester Unity quarrelled with the masons as well as the London Order, and in 1902 announced a new enemy by noting the "rare occurrence" that a "joiner had laid a brick." The conflict between plasterer, bricklayer, slater and mason was now almost habitual; the entanglements of the joiners were greater because they extended beyond the limits of the building trade into shipyards and engineering shops. The energies which the workers could not devote to fighting the employers they turned against themselves; as the shrinkage of trade made work rarer and the change of processes made divisions fainter, the unions struggled more fiercely for their share of the jobs going; there was no more co-operation than is shown by pigs at a trough. Agreement was reached slowly, rarely and painfully, upon subjects which provided limitless opportunities for quarrel. Here is a specimen agreement of the kind that more than occupied building trade union officials' time in this period:—

"Agreement made between the Carpenters' and "Joiners' Societies and the United Operative Plumb-"ers' Association upon the question of Fixing Iron "Gutters and Stack Pipes in the London District:—

"1. That on all new work, all iron rain water gutters that are fixed to wood shall be done by carpenters.

"2. That on all new work all rain water pipes shall be fixed by plumbers.

"3. That the repairing of all rain water gutters and pipes shall be done by plumbers.

"Repairing work is defined as applying to all roofs "where the whole of the old gutters are not taken down "for new ones to be substituted.

"Signed on behalf of :—

"The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners,
"R. Rust.

"The General Union of Operative Carpenters and Joiners,
"A. W. Raynor.

"The Perseverance Society of Carpenters and Joiners,
"W. Notman.

"The Associated Carpenters and Joiners,
"W. M. Thomson.

"The United Operative Plumbers' Association,
"H. J. Cardew. W. Smeaton.
"G. Bennett. G. W. Stacey."

The matter of this document, one would have thought, could have been settled within the office of a union dealing with the whole industry. But both its subject—only one of an enormous, uncatalogued series—and the number of signatures required show the lamentable condition of building trade unionism.

One craft in these sectional quarrels attained a frightful pre-eminence. The plumbers became the Ishmaels of the building world. Their affairs at headquarters were conducted about as badly as might be. The successor to G. B. Cherry was Edward Ellis Burns (1902). Drunkenness and idleness made him leave, in effect, the direction of the society as much to the local lodges as the Society as a whole. Deprived of that general guidance which they had a right to expect, and left to the promptings of their natural conservatism, the members became more and more involved in craft quarrels of every kind. They were unable to grapple with the difficulties involved in the new processes ; their only remedy was to claim that whatever had before then been done by plumbers should still be done by them, though iron or china had taken

the place of lead. In 1903 they recorded, without dissatisfaction, that they had long-standing and bitter consequent quarrels with no less than five other crafts—whitesmiths, hot-water fitters, gas fitters, zincworkers and glaziers.* More domestic quarrels followed. After a vain feeler towards amalgamation in 1904, the English association came into sharp conflict with the Scottish. A violent rupture took place in Glasgow next year : the two societies struck one against the other and the dispute lasted for years. The Scottish society announced with pride during its course that it had succeeded in preventing almost every member of the English society getting employment of any kind. This breach was not healed till 1908. By that time the plumbers had added to their list of constant and natural enemies four more crafts—joiners, slaters, plasterers, and brassfinishers. In 1906 the master-plumbers themselves were inconvenienced by this continual quarrelling and called a conference to discuss the difficulties connected with the fitting of various pipes, also tanks and cylinders and the new hot-water system. To secure the conference they had to invite the Operative Plumbers' Association, the National Association of Heating Engineers, the Association of Domestic Engineers and the Smiths and Fitters. The division that this list showed was bad enough, but it was nothing to those that came out at the conference, which was made useless by the abusive quarrel between the first two societies, who blackguarded each other's character before the masters without restraint. A check to this mad career might have been given by a serious event that occurred in 1909. The exhaustion of the funds of the English society roused suspicions, and it was found that the secretary, Burns,

* O.P.Q.R., March, 1903.

had not only neglected his duty through drunkenness, but had embezzled three hundred pounds ; worse, he had involved his assistant, the young Cherry, in his own degradation. His place was taken by J. H. Edmiston, an ageing but upright member of the association. But little change resulted in policy ; we find even in the year of the war the association welcomed a " new adversary, the gas engineer," with a glee more suitable to an Indian brave than a modern Trade Union. Small wonder that one of the members told his fellows their main characteristics were " a sleep of apathy and indifference, an almost total ignorance of modern industrial conditions and demands."*

With such disorder in the workers' ranks, the best that their leaders could do was to seek peace at all costs with the employers. Conciliation and arbitration once again became the panacea of all ills in the trade. " Strikes have lost their power," Chandler told his members, and Clarke of the Manchester Unity even demanded compulsory arbitration. The employers also were inclined to agree, now that the first shock of the trade collapse was over, and the unions had accepted the longer hours, lower wages and worse conditions demanded. A " closer union conference " was held in 1904 between the Yorkshire Master Builders' Association and the various unions of joiners, bricklayers, and masons, to consider the erection of local joint councils. The success attending this venture, which was only turned down by the Amalgamated Society, led to the drafting of a larger plan at the end of the year for district conciliation Boards, in which the plasterers and plumbers were included, to cover the whole of England. The districts,

* O.P. Monthly, September, 1906 ; December, 1909 ; January, 1912 (G. R. Isbell's letter).

with the exception of London which had its own scheme and the South-West which was late in formation, were in operation in the summer of 1905. The A.S.C.J. reversed its attitude, and, although the Plasterers, Painters and Plumbers held aloof,* the scheme was also ratified by the stonemasons, the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners and both Orders of bricklayers. This conciliation scheme ran so well that in 1908 a National Board of Conciliation was founded to cover the whole of England, while not superseding the regional Boards. Builders' Labourers, to the satisfaction of the crafts, were excluded from the National Board. It is not to be denied that the crafts reaped certain benefits from the new institution. The interminable demarcation quarrels were largely transferred to the new Boards, and not always settled by a strike. The habit of meeting together began to undermine the savage isolation of the unions. They could not help but in time recover some sense of common interest against the employer. The employers were satisfied for the moment with the abatement of the nuisance of intercraft conflicts, and there were undeniably cases in which a struggle between the employers and men was averted by a Board. But those who hoped for a cessation of industrial warfare, and the gradual growth of a sense of joint interest between master and man, were entirely disappointed.†

* Having agreements with their own master craftsmen.

† To this statement one exception must be made. The Amalgamated Slaters' and Tilers' Provident Society, which in 1906 appointed its first full-time secretary, Mr. Robert Wilson, in the same year concluded a conciliation agreement with the Master Slaters, which provided not merely for a conciliation committee, but for reference, if necessary, to an Arbitrator with powers to make a final decision. "In this way," writes Mr. Wilson, "trade disputes in the slating trade have been eliminated, and the only ones which have occurred in the last 20 years have been where our members were involved in the support of other trades, principally labourers."

It is not, indeed, the case that no attempts were made to secure the amalgamation or federation necessary. There was even a plan for a "National Committee of the Building Trades," a timid scheme drawn up at Derby in 1902 by representatives of the A.S.C.J., Amalgamated Society of Woodcutting Machinists (mill sawyers)*, plumbers and the Manchester Unity. It was far behind Coulson's earlier plan; it provided for neither funds nor legislative nor executive powers. Even so it was thought too dangerous and dropped. There was formed, it is true, in 1899 or 1900, a Union of Building Trades Federations—a federation of the local federations of the building crafts existing in many towns, called Building Trades Federations in England, but more often United Trades Committees in Scotland. But these local federations were weak in themselves, disregarded always by union headquarters, without funds or powers. Their offspring, the Union of Federations, had even less vitality. The union officials that treated the local federations with contempt, treated it with hostility. It made a hopeless attempt to stop the Conciliation Scheme in 1905, but was disregarded even by the local federations: "more than once," complained the secretary, "all Federations in the country have been written to during the year. Only two replied." The working of the conciliation schemes ruined it, and soon after it voluntarily brought its shadowy existence to an end.† In one trade alone—painting—was a step

* The Mill Sawyers' Union's progress dates from the eighties, at the beginning of which it was still thankful to take a gift of ten pounds from an employer. From then onwards it grew by absorption, taking in large Liverpool and Manchester societies, the Old London Mill Sawyers and the Scottish Machinemen's Society. Its history was peaceful and uneventful. Its first full-time secretary, Thomas Park, of Newcastle, was appointed at the beginning of this period. (Sawyers' reports.)

† L.R.D.

made even towards the simple amalgamation of rival unions fighting for the same craft. Prolonged discussions, lasting over three years, induced in 1904 the large Manchester society (N.A.S.O.H.A.S.P.A.D.) to revise its constitution so as to permit of the admission of other unions. Having done this, the Delegate Meeting actually left it at that, with the haughty notice, "We shall be pleased to receive applications," but, fortunately, wiser counsels prevailed and the London society was directly approached. The necessary vote was two-thirds of the membership, by a law which greatly impeded amalgamation, but in this case, and this case only, it was secured without difficulty, and at the end of the year the two societies had amalgamated, under the title of the larger body. This, together with the accession of some local societies, made a combined membership of sixteen thousand, not a quarter of the number possible.* No difference or improvement in methods was shown after the amalgamation by the union, which had always been unfortunate in its internal affairs. The General Council and the Executive Council quarrelled as bitterly and as regularly as before. In 1908 the General Council expelled the Executive Council from office and substituted an Acting E.C., with which it was soon on equally bad terms. This quarrel went on for two years, and in 1910 was settled by the expulsion from office of the General Secretary, G. M. Sunley, "for gross neglect of duty." His place was taken by J. Parsonage.

It was not craft spirit, but uncertainty of the officials and apathy of the rank and file that prevented amalgamations in a section always held somewhat aloof—builders' labourers. There were many societies catering for this class as well as the United Builders' Labourers'

* Painters' Annual, D.M., 1904.

Union (six thousand members, 1904*), among which we should mention the "Old Amalgamated," which, under the secretaryship of T. Coffey, one of Kenney's old associates, actually reached four-figure membership again, though it had fallen to 75 when taken over in the end by the U.B.L.U. There were also the Navvies' Union, the National Union of Labour and the Hull Builders' Labourers' Society, which had been founded in 1890, and had 776 members in 1900. It had now become the Federated Builders' Labourers', and later the National Association. All these societies (except the Hull society) were called together in 1902 to discuss amalgamation by the London Labourers' Council, which also summoned the Plumbers' Mates, the United Order of General Labourers, and the Gasworkers. The meeting could not even agree on whether it wished a builders' labourers' union or a general labourers' union, and the negotiations collapsed after months of wrangling.† The only advance in this period was the settlement of a serious quarrel between the Hull and London societies which threatened to become a regular war in the bricklayers' style.

Whatever other efforts were made for amalgamation failed in the most lamentable and absurd manner. Nearly every general secretary, and most Executive Council members, had realised by now that some kind of reorganisation was necessary ; most of them had at one time or another spoken publicly or written in favour of amalgamation or federation. But they were slow to move, and when they did act, were daunted by the most trifling obstacles. Office tradition oppressed them.

* This date is the date of the assumption of office by the present secretary, Mr. D. Haggerty. His predecessor, W. Stevenson, had to be removed for an unreliability unfortunately too common.

† Haggerty, B.L., 1902.

ROBERT APPLEGARTH

Present day photograph, lent by Mr. J. S. Middleton.

Chandler might genuinely approve of amalgamation, but when he met the General Union it was the spirit of Robert Applegarth that ruled his behaviour. Not Applegarth as he was then—for he publicly said that it was time the workers " dropped Amalgamated this, Associated that, and Equitable the other, and all banded in one giant organisation called the United Workers "*—but Applegarth as he had been when General Secretary, a man to whom the principles, constitution, benefits and even name of the Society were sacred and must be swallowed whole by any applicants for fusion. In bricklaying there were two national unions and at least two local, in joinery three national unions and an unknown number of local clubs. Organisation of any job was impossible under such conditions, the officials knew it and, intellectually, regretted it. But no sooner did they meet together than one or the other side said something that made further conversation useless. It seemed as though a dead hand held the building trade unions in its grip. The errors and hates of past years isolated them. It was not to Francis Chandler and the then Executive of the A.S.C.J. that Matkin threw defiance ; it was to John D. Prior who had tried to kill the old union in the seventies, and Applegarth who had sapped its foundations in the sixties. Clarke did not distort Batchelor's words through treachery, but because he saw always behind him the leering face of Henry Markley. The attempts that were made to amalgamate the various unions in the same craft only showed the apathy of the membership and the insuperable prejudices of the officials.

Correspondence was exchanged in 1902 between the three Carpenters' and Joiners' unions. All the general

* Humphrey, 309.

secretaries—Matkin of the General Union, Stark of the Associated, and Chandler of the Amalgamated—were agreed upon the necessity for amalgamation. The Amalgamated suspended its rule upon the admission of old members for the occasion, and a general agreement upon principle was even reached. All was well until the delegates met at Leicester in June. Matkin had assumed that the two lesser unions would make common cause against their enormous rival to enforce the establishment of a trade section,* and a change of name. He was infuriated to find that the Amalgamated had come to a private agreement with the Associated by which the latter accepted the name of the larger body, together with its complete rules and constitution. No "trade only" membership was to be allowed—in fact, the plan was merely the absorption which the General Union had fought since 1878. Matkin regarded this *coup* by the Amalgamated as no better than a card-sharper's trick, and denounced it as such. The General Union rejected it as a matter of course, and it was not really surprising that the Associated did the same, turning the agreement down by four thousand votes to three thousand.

The attempt was renewed two years later. The frequency with which the societies met together, after parting in explosive disagreement, was a testimony to the urgent pressure of modern industrial conditions; the frequency with which the Amalgamated's officers put forward exactly the same terms was a testimony to the paralysing influence of tradition. The conference that met in September received almost exactly the same ultimatum; the modifications agreed to were trifling

* *i.e.*, a section admitting members who subscribed to no friendly benefits, but to strike and lock-out pay only.

and the name of the A.S.C.J. was retained. Even though the conference agreed to the proposals, they were, of course, inacceptable to the membership, and though there was no adverse majority, they were snowed under by a great " neutral " poll.*

After an interval of three years a new and more ambitious attempt was made. Anticipating a later theory of " cognate unionism," the A.S.C.J. called in 1907 a conference of all woodworkers, including, as well as the previous attenders, delegates from the Amalgamated Society of Woodcutting Machinists, Scottish Sawmill Operatives and Woodcutting Machinemen's Society, Alliance Cabinetmakers and the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades' Association. This conference marked even less progress than the others ; it agreed only upon the proposition that nothing whatever could be done. After this failure, new proposals along the old lines were made again, which the General Union declined even to consider. The Associated took a vote, but it did not secure the necessary legal majority. Stark, however, with an honourable forgetfulness, was proceeding with the arrangements as though he had secured it, when certain members appealed to the Registrar, who, as the Associated was a registered society, was able to prohibit Stark from going on, and force a fresh vote. At the same time the Amalgamated, with incredible stupidity, announced that a " trade only " section would not be allowed in the new society, with the result that the necessary vote was not nearly secured.† Stark, whose union had not the other's old tradition of hostility to the Amalgamated, resumed negotiations

* G.U. Monthly, September, 1904 ; Annual, 1902.

† G.U. Monthly, March, 1907, Associated Monthly, 1908, January-November.

and in 1910 the larger society was at last induced to consent to a " trade and unemployment only " section, at the fairly high rate of 8d. a week subscription. This time, however, the A.S.C.J. itself could not secure the necessary majority, and Chandler wrote Stark a letter in February, 1911, intended to close the whole subject for good, declaring further discussion " hopeless." Undiscouraged, Stark secured a further interview in which the Amalgamated agreed to *admit* the Associated *en bloc*, if it could get the bare majority needed. Even this was nearly held up indefinitely by the need to get the consent of a member of the Amalgamated's General Council who lived in New Zealand, but fortunately this and other difficulties were overcome, and in September, 1911, the Associated passed over into the Amalgamated.*

This result was a trifling reward for the pains required to secure it. The main antagonists remained. But in bricklaying and masonry the result was even less. The Manchester Order moderated its conservatism slightly ; it gave the Executive in this period control over the strike and lock-out fund and in 1908, in spite of Secretary Clarke's disapproval, replaced the strictly local Executive by a nationally-elected Representative Council. But it was immovably reactionary in its external affairs. In 1900 the London Order called a meeting of the two Orders and the local Belfast and Glasgow societies to discuss amalgamation. It was unfortunate that this meeting was preceded by an explanation by a London man that the Manchester Unity consisted of " old men and cripples," but this remark alone could not excuse the conduct of the Manchester delegates, who

* Associated Monthly, February, April, July, August, 1911. Annual, 1910.

refused to take a vote on the proposals submitted, though asked to in proper form by a Lodge, and regarded themselves as tricked in being induced even to attend such a discussion. The London Order secured the absorption of the Belfast society at this time, but the relations between the two national bodies were much embittered. In 1907 they were again striking against one another in Nottingham.*

In 1908 the London O.B.S. recommenced negotiations, upon Batchelor's favourite basis of a union of the "constructional trades," plasterwork, bricklaying, masonry. Letters were written to the National Association of Plasterers and the Operative Stonemasons. The secretary of the former shelved the question by merely telling the O.B.S. to join the local building trades federations.† The Operative Stonemasons rejected the proposals on the ridiculous plea that they were "already federated through the Labour Party."‡ The Scottish Plasterers and Masons, in Batchelor's opinion, "misunderstood" the intention of the O.B.S., and demanded that a "trade only" section be introduced, which the O.B.S. would not permit.§ After this defeat the O.B.S. again approached the Manchester Order, which delayed and evaded until a direct vote of its members instructed the Council to meet the London Order. The two bodies did not actually meet, even so, until April, 1910, when, to the general surprise, they reached an agreement. It was provided (with singular unwisdom) that the Manchester members should levy themselves a sum per head to bring up their *per capita*

* Unity Reports, September, 1900; Journal, November, 1907; January, 1908.

† Plast. Monthly, April, 1908.

‡ O.S.M. *Return*, October, 1908.

§ O.B.S. Annual, 1909.

value to the O.B.S. figure. They had also to provide for ninety widows who were entitled to £5 from the Order. No sooner was the conference over than the Council of the Manchester Order, headed by Clarke, denounced the scheme. Batchelor and George Hicks (then chairman of the new London E.C.) were accused of turning the widows penniless on the street. Clarke made elaborate calculations which proved to his satisfaction that his 1,750 members would lose money by amalgamating with Batchelor's 23,300. The agitation secured the result desired; the scheme was voted down and letters poured in calling for "three cheers for the *Good Old Manchester Order!*": "we are not ashamed of being seventy-seven years old" exclaimed one lodge with toothless enthusiasm.* The last official attempt at amalgamation had collapsed.

It was in this period of utter stagnation and decay that a man of genius appeared among the ranks of the operatives, who rejected him. The real name of Robert Tressall, the author of *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists*, was Robert Noonan, an Irishman from Dublin. He returned to England from the Boer War and joined one of the painters' London branches, but the impossibility of getting work sent him on the tramp to Hastings. Here the deadness of the union so depressed him that he did not re-enrol as a member, but put all his strength into agitating for the Social Democratic Federation. He was himself an artist of great abilities—not only with his pen, as his book shows, but with his brush as well, and specimens of his work are still shown about Hastings. But at no time was he allowed to do the best that was in him; when he was not set to do unskilled work, he was forced to do scamped and shoddy

* Unity Journal, September, 1909; April-August, 1910.

work. Ill-health, tyranny, poverty and disgust at the work he, an admirer of William Morris, was forced to do, made him decide to try and work his way to America, but he died of consumption in Liverpool on his way in 1911.*

His book, damaged and distorted as it is by the brutal system that ruined his life, is still a masterpiece, a great and moving work. It is autobiographical, as is shown by the references on page 40, and gives a true and terrible picture of the life of the ordinary operative as it was in these darkest of years. Ghastly suffering and degradation, falling most of all upon the women, were not the worst. The worst was the ineradicable stupidity and servility of the workers, who received with stones and jeers any who attempted to tell them the truth.

" Owen worked on in a disheartened, sullen way," he wrote.†

" He felt like a beaten dog.

" He was oppressed by a sense of impotence and " shameful degradation.

" All his life it had been the same : incessant work " under similar conditions, and with no more result " than being just able to avoid starvation.

" And the future, as far as he could see, was as hope- " less as the past ; darker, in fact, for there would " surely come a time, if he lived long enough, when he " would be unable to work any more.

* Walsh. Painters' Monthly, December, 1922.

† Page 25 of the cheap edition. Mr. Grant Richards, the publisher, asks me to correct an impression that had arisen that this edition had been "expurgated" for political reasons. No such thing has occurred, but the first edition was 400 closely printed pages and to reprint it at a low price was impossible. It was, therefore, condensed, but no political consideration was even thought of. "The work was done reverently, the editor never losing sight for a moment of the spirit that animated the dead author."

"He thought of his child. Was he to be a slave and a "drudge all his life also? It would be better for the "boy to die now.

"As Owen thought of his child's future, there sprang "up within him a feeling of hatred and fury against "the majority of his fellow workmen.

"*They were the enemy*—those ragged-trousered philan- "thropists, who not only quietly submitted like so many "cattle to their miserable slavery for the benefit of "others, but defended it and opposed and ridiculed any "suggestion of reform.

"*They were the real oppressors*—the men who spoke "of themselves as 'the likes of us,' who, having "lived in poverty all their lives, considered that what "had been good enough for them was good enough for "the children they had been the means of bringing into "existence.

"He hated and despised them, because they calmly "saw their children condemned to hard labour and "poverty for life, and deliberately refused to make any "effort to secure better conditions for them than they "had for themselves.

"It was because they were indifferent to the fate of "*their* children that he would be unable to secure a "natural and human life for *his*. It was their apathy or "active opposition that made it impossible to establish "a better system of society, under which those who did "their fair share of the world's work would be honoured "and rewarded. Instead of helping to do this, they "abased themselves and grovelled before their op- "pressors, and compelled and taught their children to "do the same. *They* were the people who were really "responsible for the continuance of the present "system."

CHAPTER XVII

INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

DECLINE IN CONDITIONS * A NEW ERA OF POLICY * CONDITION OF ORGANISATION * SCOTTISH MASONS EXCEPTIONAL * OPPOSITION TO INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM: LAW, APATHY, OFFICIALS * POLICY OF NEW MOVEMENT * SYNDICALISM * DEFINITION * THE STATE * THE "PROVISIONAL COMMITTEE" * RANK AND FILE AGITATION * O.B.S. ADOPTION * FIRST BALLOT * SECOND BALLOT * DECLINE * 1914 LOCK-OUT * ORIGIN * COMPLEX AGREEMENTS * THE DOCUMENT * OFFICIALS AND RANK AND FILE * "DAILY HERALD" AND "DAILY CITIZEN" * THE BALLOTS * STONEMASONS' ACTION * CONFERENCE ON A NEW UNION * B.W.I.U. FORMED

1911–1914

ILL about 1900 the old policy of the amalgamated unions and others had justified itself by results. The chart of the real wages of a Glasgow stonemason, for example, given at the end of Webb's *Industrial Democracy*, marks a genuine, steady rise in conditions from about 1875 onwards. The operative builder had, in fact, improved his status. He had better clothes, better food, more money, better housing. Imperceptibly, the weight of his toil had lessened: the speeding up of the 'sixties had disappeared and the rate of working had slowed down. "This third generation should consider," writes an old officer of the Plasterers,* "what the conditions of the 'sixties were, and what they

* Lamb.

were later. In the 'sixties they worked from six a.m. to half-past five p.m. and four o'clock on the Saturdays. Wages in the large towns were 26*s.* a week, and in London 8*d.* an hour." Progress from these conditions was real and undeniable, but by 1911 it had obviously ceased. " Conditions are worse than twenty years ago," said the general secretary of the Plasterers, T. H. Otley, in 1913.* He ascribed the decline to the revival of sub-contracting, and of small masters who insisted on piece-work. But the evil was far more general. Employment was everywhere scarce. Wages stood still, prices rose. Wealth did not cease to pour into the country, but the " rich got richer and the poor poorer." The period of British capitalism in which the standard of life of the mass of the people tended on the whole to rise, had ended and given place to a period in which on the whole the standard of life fell. If from 1877 to 1900 the workers, on the average, gained ground, from 1900 to 1923, on the average, they have lost. Even a master builder† wrote, "I am afraid I used to allow myself the very comfortable belief that progress would come by slow and almost imperceptible stages. . . . This complacent attitude received a severe shock when I realised that *real* wages were declining, that organised employers were becoming more and more firmly entrenched, and that the gulf between the management and labour was apparently growing wider."

Now that capitalism had resumed its normal tendency to thrust down the standard of life of the operative, a change in union policy and structure was in time inevitable. The building workers, in so far as they were conscious of their class interest, were about to return to

* Plast. Annual, 1913.

† Sparkes, Garton, 23.

their original aim of destroying the profit making system and substituting a Socialist commonwealth. Just as the year 1860, more or less, closes a revolutionary period of building trades unionism and opens a reformist period, so the year 1911, more or less, closes the reformist period and opens a new revolutionary era. This does not mean, of course, that revolutionary feeling did not persist for a while in the era we have called "reformist," or that reformist tendencies are not to be found in the present age which we have called revolutionary. Nevertheless, as the spirit of the older unionism was destroyed in 1860 and after, by a new policy of contentment with the existing order and desire to make the best of it, so in its turn that policy was driven out by a feeling of discontent with the present order and desire for its destruction. Similarly, as Applegarth's policy was based on the fact that it was then possible for the workers' condition to be improved within the existing system, so the policy of the industrial unionists was based on the fact that the system now offered the operative the prospect of nothing but further degradation.

While nothing was easier in theory than for the building operatives to unite in one revolutionary union, the obstacles created by their past history were immense. The very strength of the work of Applegarth and Coulson was a hindrance. What had been once a tower of strength against the enemy outside had now become an unbreakable prison for those inside. The extreme conservatism of the official routine had not changed. The State Socialist movement which began to influence trades unionism in the 'nineties had affected the building trades very little. Here and there lesser officials had been converted, but the rank and file

had not listened. Moreover, the State Socialists had a contempt for industrial action and trusted exclusively to Parliament. Their representatives in the building trades almost all agreed with their leader, J. Ramsay MacDonald, in his quaint description of the new movement as "one of already too numerous vipers."* But for the most part the building trades union officials, local and national, held views even more out of date than the State Socialists. We find, for example, a painters' officer expressing fear at "the creeping Socialistic views."† The Scottish Painters Society, as late as 1917, refused to pay its clerks a trade union rate. The General Union of Carpenters and Joiners retained to the very end of its separate existence a rule by which the seat of government might be moved every four years. In 1919, to the general astonishment, the membership insisted on having it moved from London, where it had been for many years, to Warrington ; and moved it was, though infinite confusion was caused, money wasted, priceless documents lost, and William Matkin's death hastened. The O.B.S. (London Order) was generally held to be a more advanced body, yet there only expired in 1900 a ten-year period in which no change in its constitution was permitted to be made.‡ The Stonemasons, after 28 years, had just undone Broadhurst's reform and sent their seat of government wandering again, being suspicious of the purely London executive. They moved it to Manchester in 1911.

Such was the state of mind of the officials of the various unions. Their preparedness for joint action, by

* O.S.M. *Returns*, September, 1912.
† Painters' Quart., September, 1911
‡ O.B.S. Monthly, October, 1889.

federation or otherwise, was not much better. The condition of the building industry in 1911 or 1912 was well described in a book published in 1913* :—

"The Building industry is now organised in 67† "Unions, local and national, and 13 local Federations. "Working for a local market and for the most part on "discontinuous jobs, labour in the building trades must "be organised to some extent on a local basis. The "locality is the unit which has to be paralysed ; and as "the jobs are discontinuous, action has to be taken "rapidly. The present state of organisation is exactly the "reverse ; the national Unions are strongly entrenched, "and act throughout independently, for their own hand: "the local Federations are weak, and cannot move without the sanction of the national Unions. All the funds "are in the hands of the unions, and the Federations "have to raise all money by means of special subscriptions ; no encouragement is given by the Unions to "their branches to join the local Federations, nor are "the Federation dues paid out of the Union funds. "Were this all, the position would be bad enough ; but "there is worse to come. Success depends, in the Building industry, on the complete paralysing of the job, "or the locality ; all the sections must act together, and "there must be some means of controlling all possible "blacklegs. But, in the first place, the immense number "of non-unionists in the industry generally makes it "quite impossible to paralyse a district, and even where "non-unionism is comparatively unimportant, the "separate Unions generally pull in different directions. "Not only do the sections fall out among themselves "locally ; far more disastrous is the fact that often half a

* G. D. H. Cole : "The World of Labour," pp. 266-9.

† Rather, 72.

" dozen distinct policies are being dictated to them by as
" many distinct Head Offices. The Unions have different
" methods of negotiation ; they tie themselves up with
" sectional agreements expiring at different dates, and
" effective common action becomes altogether impos-
" sible. Sometimes, some of the most important sections
" remain outside the local building Federation, and con-
" clude on their own agreements that are disastrous to
" the other sections. Moreover, the National Conciliation
" tion Board is probably the most reactionary Labour
" body in existence. Instead of direct negotiations be-
" tween a solid body of employers and a solid body of
" masters, it works by a system of cross voting. Often
" enough of the workers' representatives seem to vote
" with the employers to allow of the carrying of per-
" fectly preposterous resolutions. In this case, at least,
" conciliation has served only to ' dish ' the workers.

" Even apart from this difficulty, the local Federations
" are now hampered at every turn. Their objects are to
" settle questions of demarcation and to secure united
" action ; but it is far from surprising that they have
" failed in both. The presence of overlapping Unions,
" and still more the failure of the old craft Unions to open
" their ranks when old processes gave way to new, have
" made the demarcation question insoluble. No attempt
" can be made to solve it until all the Unions are working
" together in friendly co-operation, and a real effort is
" made to bring in the unorganised. Demarcation dis-
" putes are nowhere so bitter as in the Building In-
" dustry.

" In securing united action, the Federations encoun-
" tered a further difficulty. Rapid action, we have seen,
" is always essential to success ; but the first requisite, if
" rapid action is to be possible, is the concentration of

" power in the hands of a single authority. The problem
" is in the case not merely that of local as against central
" control; it arises because the central authority is itself
" a many-headed monster, or worse. In each Union, the
" branch has to obtain the sanction of its national Execu-
" tive before a strike can be declared; this means that
" every strike requires the permission of a number of
" isolated and independent national Executives, which
" there is no attempt to co-ordinate. As these meet at
" different times, the delay involved often runs into six
" weeks, and by that time it is generally too late to act.
" Very often the cause of dispute is particular, and
" applies only to a single job; but by the time the whole
" of the workers can come out, the job is finished. If the
" local Federation takes on itself the responsibility of
" calling out the workers without the sanction of the
" Unions, it is in the unfortunate position of having no
" funds, and of being unable to collect any. A Federa-
" tion cannot collect funds except through the branches
" composing it; and these are, as a rule, unwilling to pay
" twice over—to the national Union and to the local
" Federation. It is, under such conditions, almost im-
" possible to raise special levies for the support of
" strikes."

To the general futility of the unions there was one exception. The Scottish Operative Masons began to recover from their defeat of 1904. After that appalling collapse, G. B. Craig, the Central Corresponding Secretary, had fallen into a state of idle despair which prevented any attempt being made to revive the union. To remove him was very difficult. A man might count upon the fingers of his hands the General Secretaries who have been removed from their posts in the building trades. If he wished to number those who have been

dismissed from their posts by the members' choice merely, and not after suspension or a formal accusation of misconduct by an E.C., he will not need to count at all. An indirect method was taken by the Scottish Masons at the end of 1911, when it was proposed and carried that the two offices of Travelling Delegate and Secretary be amalgamated and both Craig and William Gordon (the "T.D.") be allowed to stand. By these means Craig was ousted and Gordon elected for the heavy task of reviving the union. Ten hours were being worked per day again in some parts of Scotland, and labourers, under the title of "machine men" (stone planers), had taken masons' work not at masons' wages, during the union's decay. The strain and worry of his position broke open an internal wound in his head, and the new secretary lost his reason in the service of the society. After a fleeting return of sanity, Gordon's mind was despaired of in 1913 and his place was taken by J. F. Armour as General Secretary, and H. Macpherson as Financial and Corresponding Secretary. The society, from 1911, began gradually to recover, but progress was slow and the debts were crushing. It had not recovered its previous position until the summer of 1914, and its slow revival prevented the industrial unionist movement having any marked effect on it, or, indeed, upon Scotland at all.*

In the building industry as a whole the industrial unionists were faced with three main difficulties—the state of the law, the apathy of the members, and the opposition of the officials. The law required that two-thirds of the membership of a union should assent to an amalgamation. The apathy of the members has already

* S.O.M. Journal, December, 1911; February, April, 1912; September, November, December, 1913.

been sufficiently noticed, but it was now increased by a peculiar circumstance. After 1911, with the passing of the Insurance Act, the membership of all building unions was increased by a mass of indifferent and lukewarm unionists, who joined merely because they must join some society under the Act and had horse sense enough to avoid the insurance companies. In time they became good members; but in this period to get them to poll for or against amalgamation was almost impossible. The opposition of the officials arose from many causes; indeed, in some cases, was almost unconscious sabotage. They resented interference from outside, by ordinary members, sometimes even belonging to another craft, with customs and even abuses which had always been undisturbed. Change of any kind annoyed them, and the dead hand of tradition was very heavy on them. The fear of losing a good post, not merely its salary but also its dignity, also operated with many. But finally, they resented and fought a whole new social philosophy. They believed in, and shaped their policy by, a philosophy of social peace. They believed in conciliation, loyal service of employers, observance of agreements, co-operation between master and man, development of craft spirit and craft technique, and a Liberal devotion to the community at large, including employers as well as employed. To all these conceptions the new industrial unionists opposed a denial which shocked them beyond words.

Their policy was a policy of class war. Their aim was the expropriation, by force and without consent, of the employing class as a whole. The only criterion of action was the advantage of the workers and disadvantage of the masters. With the old-fashioned

talk of the sanctity of agreements they had no patience. "Agreements or arrangements (from our side) are always determined by our strength of organisation, intellectually and numerically. When we are weak, we are compelled to accept terms unfavourable to us. Recognising all the time that our object is to remove the master class from ownership, it is up to us to take any and every opportunity to weaken the forces of opposition and to improve our social well-being, and if to do this it is necessary to break an agreement, to the making of which we have been unwilling victims, then we shall break it. Fancy the masters keeping agreements when it is not convenient! The guarantees for keeping contracts do not consist of money pledges or words of honour, but a strong organisation. . . . We are respected *only* when we are feared."*

The Industrial Unionist movement in building was closely linked with the industrial unionist movement in mining and engineering, and thus with French and American Syndicalism. Indeed, the Stonemasons' journal habitually spoke of the two movements as identical. But the industrial unionist movement was not merely borrowed from France. It had a strong likeness to French syndicalism, and Tom Mann, its most powerful advocate, called himself a Syndicalist. But it was a native growth and lacked certain of the most characteristic and most advertised features of French syndicalism. While urging unrelenting war upon the masters, to culminate in a revolutionary general strike, the English industrial unionists did not lay stress upon the need for sabotage and bad work in the meantime. Nor did they trouble to scandalise bourgeois public opinion by

* G. Hicks in Preface to J. V. Wills' "The Case for Amalgamation."

borrowing the phrases about a new morality corresponding to the new social order, or announce that they were no more bound by bourgeois ethics and would act just as they pleased. They confined themselves more to the immediate task of fitting the workers for industrial war on their masters.

"Industrial Unions must take the place of Trade "Unions and be imbued with the virile determination "that they are *associations of workers for overpowering the "octopus of capitalism with its attendant evil, the wage "system, and securing the complete control of industry in the "interests of the whole community.* This is the vital "difference to all other isms. . . . To sum up, "Industrial Unionism means :—

"(a) The organisation of every worker (manual and "brain) corresponding to the industries in "which they are employed, thus :—

"'Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union,'
"'Building Workers' Industrial Union,'
"'Mining Workers' Industrial Union,'
"'Transport Workers' Industrial Union,'
"etc., etc.

"(b) That the Industrial Union shall embrace all "workers actually employed in that industry, "regardless of grade, craft, creed, politics "or sex.

"(c) That internal organisation shall be of such a "character as to allow complete autonomy for "the various Branches, crafts, and grades to "discuss and promote the advance of their particular interests, consistent with the general "policy and effectiveness of the whole organisation.

"(d) The Industrial Unions shall be linked up, "nationally and internationally, in a similar "way in which the 'triple alliance' of "Miners, Railway Workers, and Transport "Workers are now linked up, with the avowed "object of

"(e) Securing control of industry and the abolition "of the wages system.

"Society is divided into two classes, the working "class and the employing class—the exploiters and "exploited. There can be no peace among the two "classes while the employing class own and control "all the means of life, the State, press and platform. ". . . The mistake of the Political Socialist is in "the forgetting that political government is run in "the interests of the capitalist class. . . . The State is "capitalistic in its deepest essence."*

Oppressed by the distinction between "political" and "industrial" action, they declared exclusively for the latter. They despised the political Socialist as at the best a fool for trying to use the State for a purpose that it was not formed for, at the worst for a scoundrel for misleading the workers. They did not in England, however, proceed farther. They were not prepared for armed insurrection, nor did they discuss it. The French syndicalists, as was shown in Pataud and Pouget's famous romance, were prepared for their general strike ending in an armed uprising and bloodshed. The English industrial unionists, in their public propaganda, were content to advocate the ignoring of the State and believed that industrial action would render it powerless to stop the workers.

* From *Industrial Unionism*, published by the B.W.I.U. (Hamilton).

It is not possible to put an exact date to the appearance of industrial unionism in the building industry. The first number of Tom Mann's monthly pamphlet, the *Industrial Syndicalist*, appeared in the summer of 1910. The first overt appearance of industrial unionism in the building industry is at the beginning of 1911. But the ideas had been germinating for some time before. The industrial unionist movement was unlike all previous movements in the building industry. It was a rank and file movement, primarily *against* the existing officials and existing unions. It was at the beginning a partly unorganised attempt by a mass of men to resume control over their unions and to force their officials into a new policy, to seize their hands as it were and force them to draft and sign proposals and a policy they often detested. It is not possible to trace exactly the beginning of a movement like this, any more than one can place one's finger upon the source of a river.

The first tangible recorded act was at the end of 1910, when the Walthamstow Branch of the O.B.S., holding a meeting to discuss the action of certain foremen, members of the union, in giving jobs to non-unionists, deflected the discussion on to better organisation as a whole. It was decided to adjourn the discussion to the Bricklayers' Hall in Southwark Bridge Road for a general meeting on industrial unionism addressed by George Hicks. From this second meeting arose the "Provisional Committee for the Consolidation of the Building Industries Trades' Unions into one Industrial Organisation," appointed February 12, 1911. The members of it, originally mostly O.B.S. men, were never delegates of any union; they were for the most part individual members of the various unions sitting in their private capacity. They held regular public

meetings, by permission of the E.C., in the Bricklayers' Hall. They had the aid of the Syndicalists from the general movement. On April 11 they issued their first leaflet.

The omens were unfavourable. Ten years of amalgamation attempts by officials had not succeeded. A proposal to resume these attempts had just been made to the Operative Stonemasons, when Hancock retired and his place as General Secretary was taken by W. Williams. Only 286 members troubled to record their votes. Nevertheless, the success of the new Committee was enormous. Their methods were absolutely different from those of the general secretaries. They sent no letters to officials but called and attended rank and file meetings. No one was paid in connection with the work. Their leaflet was taken up avidly, and soon was followed by another ; in the end four in all. The strongest advocates, as was natural, came from the trades worst hit by new processes—bricklaying and masonry—* but the movement passed right beyond the bounds of craft. The Provisional Committee contained plumbers, painters, joiners, labourers, plasterers, masons and bricklayers. The leaflets penetrated the lodges of every union. Interest revived quickly. Outside the industry, great conflicts were threatening, and the miners and other trades were being stirred by syndicalist agitation. Building workers began to attend to their union organisation. Lodge meetings picked up a bit. Union magazines, which had been innocent for years of any contributions by the rank and file, were filled with letters hotly arguing the merits of amalgamation. Even the

* For example, George Hicks and Jack V. Wills, both O.B.S., were successively secretaries, F. Bowers and J. Hamilton, O.S.M., two of the most active speakers.

age-long conservatism of the plumbers was disturbed by letters saying "sectional organisation is a hopeless failure." "I want to see a Building Workers' Industrial Union based upon a clear conception of the clashing interests between the worker and the employer."* The two slogans of the Committee :—"There are 72 unions in the Building Trade—we want one"; "More unity and less unions," were soon common property. Speakers were sent out in time to practically every metropolitan branch of the building trade unions. Soon calls began to multiply from the provinces and the Committee's speakers were run off their legs.

It was essential to get some sort of official footing, and the O.B.S. was indicated as the easiest body, owing to the complaisance of Batchelor, to seize as a basis of operations. The Annual Movable General Council for 1911 received ten Branch resolutions instructing it to take action about amalgamation,† and it decided to order the E.C. to appoint a Committee in connection with the existing Provisional Committee. The Committee now had a base of operations, and, what was more important, access to some funds for propaganda. Its agitation, moreover, was given a great advertisement by the motion in favour of industrial unionism moved by delegates of the O.B.S. at the Trades Union Congress and adopted.

With its official adoption by the O.B.S. the amalgamation movement swept forward again. A "syllabus of a lecture," on industrial unionist lines, was printed and sent broadcast. Its terms, and, indeed, its appearance at all, mark the change from the past.‡ The Executive of

* O.P. Monthly, July, 1912 ; Traquair's letter.
† Bricklayers A.M.G.C., 1911.
‡ Printed in full in the Appendix.

the O.B.S.—again propelled by the industrial unionists—now approached the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress and asked it to give effect to the Congress resolution on industrial unionism by summoning a conference of building trades union representatives to draft a plan for " consolidation." This, after due delay, was done. The executives and officials, however annoyed they might be secretly, would not insult the Parliamentary Committee, and the conference met in June, 1912. No English union of importance failed to attend, except the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners, whose ageing secretary, William Matkin, did not disguise his hatred of the new movement.

The issue of the conference was largely in the hands of the industrial unionists. Although most of the delegates who attended were officials or connected with the official element, all had at one time or another expressed themselves in favour of closer unity. Direct opposition was not to be expected, but indirect hindering was probable. However frequently they might have expressed a desire for amalgamation, when they were faced with a real probability of their organisations being swallowed up in one vast union, the officials might draw back. They were like horses of uncertain temper, and might " bolt " at any moment. Hence it was felt wiser not to submit a complete scheme of amalgamation, which would have given limitless opportunities for quibbling and disagreement on details. It was resolved to draft a scheme merely in general terms, which would be equivalent simply to a declaration in principle in favour of amalgamation. If this were carried, the officials would be tied, it was reckoned, and then progress could be made. The scheme agreed on, therefore, merely read :—

"Name — The Amalgamated Building Workers' "Union.

"Object—To unite all workmen in the present build- "ing Trades Unions into ONE union, embracing "the whole of the wage workers therein with a "view

"(1st) To maintain a fighting organisation, work- "ing to improve the material conditions of "the workers engaged in the building in- "dustry; to take joint action with other "similar unions in the furtherance of "the interests of the workers nationally "and internationally, believing that the "interests of all wage workers are "identical.

"(2nd) The systematic organisation of propaganda "among the workers, upon the necessity of "becoming organised on the industrial "field, upon the basis of class instead of "craft. Organise by industry as workers, "instead of by sections as craftsmen.

"Financial—(1st) For trade purposes, a uniform "scale of contributions and benefits.

"(2nd) The amalgamation of the friendly "side benefits into a separate account."

This scheme, together with a preamble, was adopted by the conference, and ballot papers were to be sent from the Parliamentary Committee, without comment, in identical terms to every union. But no sooner had the conference broken up than the hidden opposition showed itself. Ten of the twenty-one unions decided not to take a ballot. Of these, except the General Union, the only society of importance was the painters'.

J. Parsonage, Secretary of the N.A.S.O.H.A.S.P.A.D., had previously sent round circulars attacking amalgamation, and he now induced his executive to decide not to permit the ballot to be taken, saying that the scheme, although their delegates had agreed to it, was too indefinite for their members to be troubled with it. The audacity of this explanation defeated itself; the days had passed when an executive could treat a union as its private property and do what it liked with it. An outburst of indignation followed the announcement. The Provisional Committee, called in its reconstructed form the Consolidation Committee, grossly sinned against the old-fashioned trade union etiquette by interfering in the private affairs of another union. The Bricklayers' Hall, again, was taken for a protest meeting of painters, organised by a bricklayer. No less than twenty-four out of the twenty-seven London lodges of the N.A.S.O.H.A.S.P.A.D. attended and passed a resolution denouncing the action of the E.C. and closing significantly :—"Failing to receive ballot papers, we stop financial supplies." The threat was effective, for although the E.C. did not change its decision (and it was probably too late then in any case), when the painters' General Council met in February next year it ordered Parsonage to take a vote on the later scheme issued that year. Similarly the E.C. of the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners was so affected by the storm of obloquy worked up by the industrial unionists (who issued a leaflet accusing Matkin, Chandler, and Parsonage of scabbing the London plasterers' dispute) that, though it held out for the moment, it, too, took a ballot vote next year as meekly as a lamb.

These, however, were the last successes of the industrial unionists. The slow process of taking the ballot

was eventually completed and the Parliamentary Committee issued the figures on October 22, 1912. They read as follows :—

AMALGAMATION OF BUILDING TRADE UNIONS.

RESULT OF BALLOT.

Society applying for Ballot Papers	*No. of papers supplied*	*In favour of Amal.*	*Against Amal.*	*No. votes recorded*
Amal. Carpenters & Joiners ...	55,000	18,690	10,523	29,213
Bricklayers	24,000	4,371	763	5,134
Plumbers	11,250	1,606	291	1,897
Stonemasons	8,000	1,209	61	1,270
Plasterers	7,700	1,738	310	2,048
Builders' Labourers (National) ...	4,500	756	2	758
Builders' Labourers (United) ...	3,000	2,369	40	2,409
Bricklayers (Manchester Unity) ...	1,670	427	61	488
Street Masons & Paviors ...	1,150	152	104	256
Painters & Decorators (London & Provincial)	900	223	1	224
Mosaic & Tile Fixers	100	—	—	—
Totals	117,370	31,541	12,156	43,697

Number of voting papers supplied	117,370
Number of votes recorded	43,697
Papers unaccounted for	73,673
Votes in favour of amalgamation	31,541
Votes against amalgamation	12,156
Majority in favour	19,385

The effect of those figures was to show that the industrial unionists, though they had secured a majority in every trade, had failed to move the dead weight of the "insurance members." When the scheme got so far advanced that the amalgamation "two thirds" were required, disaster seemed probable. Anyhow, those who had been merely forced to pay lip service to amalgamation through fear of an enormous rank and file vote, were encouraged by the figures to break away. The

A.S.C.J. executive decided that it would take no further votes on amalgamation, on the ground that it preferred federation, and the defection of so important and wealthy a union was a very severe blow indeed.*

The delegates of the rest of the unions which had approved, nevertheless met together again, as arranged, for the drafting a scheme. It might be that members had actually refrained from voting because of the vagueness of the scheme. Perhaps a definite and final draft would secure the necessary votes. With this idea the conference drafted out what was practically a new constitution. The new proposal (1913) retained the 1912 name, objects and first paragraph. It provided for strike, victimisation and trade privilege pay only—no friendly benefits. The subscription was to be 2½d. a week, and provision was made for the officials who would lose their posts by

* It is impossible to pass this without a remark upon the extraordinary latitude the officials did allow themselves in this period. The members of the A.S.C.J. that voted had voted by a large majority in favour of the principle of amalgamation, nor was their poll less than that usual on other questions. But their leaders quite undisturbedly ignored that vote and substituted the principle of federation, for which no one had voted or been asked to vote, with no further explanation than that they thought it better The members were treated like children, and, like children, endorsed their own disciplining afterwards. While, however, the effect of official sabotage was great, it must be remembered that it was worst in painting, joinery and plumbing—precisely the trades which had a large membership outside building, and, therefore, a sound economic reason for questioning amalgamation with a purely building union. It had, consequently, its roots deeper than mere malice or arrogance. Also, certain officials who had opposed sectional amalgamations worked willingly for a larger scheme which did not seem simply to equal being eaten up by a rival. G. H. Clarke wrote to J. V. Wills later : "The poor officials catch it pretty well from your circular. I do not mind that in the least. I only wish all trade unionists of what is called the rank and file would show some energy and push. The officials on one side, *one* meeting would then be sufficient, and we should get to work quickly. To show that I, as an official of 23 years standing, do not desire to hinder your work, I have published your circular in our Monthly Journal"—*Unity Journal*, January, 1914.

amalgamation. No paid officer, however, could vote on any proposition. The Executive Council was to be made up of one representative of every craft, with additional representatives for the larger crafts up to three members. Attached to this draft was a section labelled " Part II," dealing with amalgamation of friendly benefits, marked " optional," and in fact a mere skeleton. These were sent out, as before, to ballot by the Parliamentary Committee, and the result was announced in July, 1913. The figures were even more deplorable. There was an absolute majority against Part II. As for the main scheme, over 112,000 ballot papers had been issued, but only 25,762 votes had been recorded. Of these, 14,279 were in favour and 11,485 against, giving a majority of no more than 2,794. In no case, of course, was there anything like a sufficient majority on which to proceed to amalgamation. There voted for amalgamation, apart from the small Manchester Unity of Operative Bricklayers and the " Cave " London Society of Painters, only three labourers' societies, the National Association, the United Builders' Labourers' Union, and the United Order of General Labourers. The O.B.S. itself had voted against Part II., though for Part I. The scheme was rejected altogether by the United Operative Plumbers, the Painters (N.A.S.O. H.A.S.P.A.D.), the Slaters and Tilers, the Plasterers, the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners, and the Electrical Trades Union. The Stonemasons had voted for, by a small majority, but the E.C. declared the votes invalid because of the small poll. The Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners, the Scottish Painters' Society and the French Polishers had refused even to take a ballot. Nothing could be done.*

* Hamilton.

Thoroughly discouraged, as it well might be, the Consolidation Committee offered to the 1913 Annual Council of the London Order (O.B.S.) the despairing suggestion that it throw open the O.B.S. to all building workers. This proposal would simply have meant a quarrel with every other union in the kingdom, and was rejected.* J. V. Wills, who had succeeded George Hicks as secretary to the Committee on the latter being appointed an O.B.S. organiser, continued the agitation, and at the end of the year a new Committee was got together, which received the more or less languid support of the Plasterers, the Manchester Unity of Bricklayers, the O.B.S., the O.S.M., the Navvies' Union, and the United Builders' Labourers.† There was less real confidence and support than before, though there was a large body of opinion prepared to struggle on indefinitely. But just as a new scheme had been drafted, and long before it could be sent to a vote, the whole movement was overshadowed and forgotten in the great lock-out.

Throughout 1912 and 1913 the new spirit had manifested itself in innumerable disputes with the employers. In particular, the propaganda of the industrial unionists had inspired a general desire to strengthen the trade unions by the elimination of non-unionists. Lightning strikes against non-unionists burst out in 1912 and continued right through this period. They were supported and organised, where possible, by the local Federations ; in particular, though its chairman denied it, by the only strong federation with funds, the London Building Industries Federation (L.B.I.F.). The executives, however, of the various unions almost without exception

* Bricklayers' A.M.G.C., 1913.

† *Unity Journal*, January, 1914.

disliked the action of the Federations and were out of touch with the men. They negotiated separately, one after another in 1913, agreements with the employers which arranged, indeed, for a penny or half-penny rise an hour, but universally tied the men to the slow processes of the Boards of Conciliation. In most cases these agreements required six months' notice for their termination. The building trade unionists were consequently again tied down by a network of elaborate and varying working rules which made common action impossible. The executives had no love for non-unionists, and always denied that Conciliation Boards should deal with the question. But they were tied generally to a policy of industrial peace. They made great efforts to enforce the observation of the new agreements. The 1913 meeting of the General Council of the A.S.C.J. issued orders, which were not to be changed for three years, to the E.C., never under any circumstances to grant " trade privilege "* to members until after " exhausting all methods " provided by the Conciliation Boards, and further and worse, that whenever a Board gave any decision " the E.C. give immediate effect to same."

Never was there a more idle decision. The executives might sign, but the members took no notice of their instructions. The strikes against non-unionists sprang up again. The London master builders were stirred to action by a strike at the " Pearl Insurance " offices being built in Holborn. William Murphy, of Dublin, had just scored a temporary victory over Larkin's union which spurred them on to emulate his union-smashing. They prepared a general attack, and the London lodges scarcely had time to refuse the terms demanded before

* Permission to strike for improvement. This does not cover the non-unionist question.

they were thrown on the streets by a general lock-out on January 24, 1914. Nor were any to be readmitted until they signed the following "Document":—

"———— 1914.

"To Messrs.————

"I agree, if employed by you, to peacefully work with "my fellow employes (engaged either in your direct "employment or in that of any sub-contractor) whether "they are members of a trade society or not, and I agree "that I will not quit your employment because any of "your employes is or is not a member of any trade "society; and I also agree that if I commit any breach "of this agreement I shall be subject to a fine of twenty "shillings, and I agree that the amount of such fine may "be deducted from any wages which may be due to me.

"Witness———— Name————

"Address————"

The great conflict of 1914 bears a fantastic resemblance to the lock-outs of 1834, of 1859 and, to a certain extent, of 1872. It arose from an attempt by the operatives to secure an advantage. It was a lock-out in reply by the masters, who used the "document" in an attempt to do injury to the fabric of trade unionism. It ended unsuccessfully for the workers after the masons had broken away. It concentrated, while it was on, the whole attention of the trade union world.

Some thirty to forty thousand operatives were involved at once, and received the automatic support of their unions. Somewhat to the surprise of the London Master Builders' Association, their shops remained deserted. They had reckoned on a fair supply of blacklegs, but even non-unionists, with irrational loyalty, were refusing to sign a document promising not to strike against themselves. The masters' chances were

decreased by the deliberately arrogant tone they had assumed, fancying themselves already in the position of Dublin Murphy. Such attempts as they made to get London work taken and finished outside London in the south country were stopped at once. At the beginning of April the deadlock was still complete and there was no sign of weakening, although the labourers' unions were now carrying on only by means of subscriptions and loans.

In the operatives' camp, however, there was the now inevitable division between the officials and the rank and file. The officials, who with certain exceptions justly represented their executive councils, wished merely to get the withdrawal of the document and the return of the members under the old conditions for each craft. The L.B.I.F., though often unceremoniously thrust aside by the E.C.'s, did represent far more nearly the London rank and file. It and its constituents desired not merely the withdrawal of the document, but also freedom to deal with non-unionists. (Later, suggestions were made of higher wages and better conditions, but these were not generally adopted.) Conflict between the two groups was certain when the Master Builders decided to withdraw the document, which they did on the 16th of April. Terms were drawn up by the National Conciliation Board which really amounted to no more than that withdrawal. The division among the operatives at once became marked. The official point of view was for immediate acceptance, and was pressed upon the public by the *Daily Citizen*. The *Daily Herald* spoke for the other side and denounced the terms. The relative influence of the two journals and the groups they spoke for may be judged by the result of the workers'

ballot, which was: For acceptance, 2,021; Against, 23,481.* Among these were the masons' votes: For, 460; Against, 449.

The lock-out was continued. Although the Stonemasons' Executive congratulated the *Daily Herald*, the split between the official element and the rank and file was now general. When the *Daily Herald* arranged a great Albert Hall meeting to support the locked-out men, addressed by C. W. Bowerman and W. Appleton, not a single builders' official of note was on the platform. On the 15th of May when the executives, ignoring the L.B.I.F., met the masters in secret, the lack of contact was such that the entrances to the hall were picketed by members of the unions bearing posters asking their leaders not to sell out. From this conference came a fresh set of terms, which the Master Builders described as final. They were based on the working rules granted to the plasterers after a dispute the year before. There was no document or fine, but neither were there any uniform working rules. Separate craft agreements remained. Strikes against non-unionists were forbidden, and the question as a whole must be left to the Boards of Conciliation, whose position was restored. Ticket inspection and uniform overtime rates were agreed to and the painters' and labourers' societies would be recognised. Unless these terms were accepted, concluded the masters, the London lock-out would be turned into a national lock-out. The Union officials, and the *Daily Citizen*, made great efforts to get the terms accepted, being thoroughly alarmed at the suggestion of a

* London voting only. The capitalist press naturally did its best to injure the operatives. The *Daily News* distinguished itself by an insidious article signed A.G.G., suggesting that no support should be given to the men because of their "trade union indiscipline."

national lock-out. The *Daily Herald* and the L.B.I.F. pointed to the new £100,000 contract signed with the Theosophical Society by the L.B.I.F. (for the building of their new offices by direct labour) and described the masters' threats as bluff. The voting, after great agitation, was: For acceptance, 5,824; Against, 21,017. The masons voted: For, 775; Against, 204. The London Master Builders then formally asked the National Association to call a national lock-out (May 28th). Nevertheless, weeks passed by without the lock-out being declared.

Whether the threat was a bluff or not is uncertain. But there were some people who took it seriously. The Stonemasons' executive supported the locked-out men enthusiastically. But they were getting more and more out of touch with their London members and officers, who, in agreement with the General Secretary, wanted the dispute closed right away. As a result of negotiations between the O.S.M. London Disputes Committee and the General Secretary, the latter called together the General Council of the Society " a few days earlier than intended " without the knowledge of the executive The General Council proved all that could be desired, and on June 11 the locked-out men were disquieted by the news that the General Council had expelled the Stonemasons' executive from the office and taken its place. The *Daily Herald*, suspecting what was to come, now openly said: " You have two enemies, the L.M.B.A. and the officials."

The Stonemasons' Council hustled. It led the majority of the union executives,* totally ignoring the L.B.I.F., into a fresh conference from which emerged a scheme differing in no essential from those already rejected. This

* O.S.M., A.S.C.J., Manchester Unity, U.B.L.U., Navvies, Crane Drivers, Operative Plumbers, N.A.S.O.H.A.S.P.A.D.

was put to the vote quickly and as expeditiously rejected by 14,081 votes to 4,565. The Stonemasons' Council, however, was not to be stopped by such a poll. It had replied to a bitter circular from the expelled executive, attacking it and the Secretary, W. Williams, by disqualifying the members from office. It now announced its intention of negotiating separately with the masters and going back to work. A desperate effort was made by the London trades to save the solidarity of the movement by calling a delegate meeting (June 24th), which decided, by 21,000 to 9,000, that all trades should take steps to make a settlement, but that " no trade should resume work until all sections had effected a settlement." The Stonemasons' Council proceeded, with the general support of its members, and the next day made their own terms. At the beginning of July the masons were back in the yards.

It would be an understatement to say that the other London operatives were appalled by the masons' action. Though the *Daily Herald* headlines screamed " NO OTHER UNION DARE FOLLOW THE MASONS AND TURN TRAITOR," the heart had gone out of the operatives. Each was waiting for the next desertion. Defeat was now expected, and so defeat was practically certain. The employers went forward at last seriously with the plans for a national lock-out and by the end of July had the necessary ballot authorisation. Sectional negotiations began again.

But before the last embers of the lock-out were trodden out, a grave step was taken by the industrial unionists in the building industry. Their plans for amalgamation had failed. The A.S.C.J. scheme of federation had been published at the end of 1913 and overwhelmed by the derision of all sides. The lock-out had been a steady

record, from their point of view, of treachery, incompetence and division. Action was urgent, but they had proved time and again in the last three years that they could not overcome both the apathy of the rank and file and the hostility of the officials. Therefore, the Committee decided to call for August 2 and 3 in Birmingham a Conference to consider founding a new union.

About fifty delegates attended, but what strength they represented was uncertain. They included several full-time officials, but the support promised did not materialise in all cases. They were, however, all men of undoubted influence and great energy. The proceedings were all but unanimous. Three members spoke hesitatingly for further delay, but for the most the decision was already taken. " I have come here to become a member of the new organisation right away," said the Chairman, Lewis. " We have not had in all the correspondence one adverse idea with regard to the agenda," said J. V. Wills, the secretary. The only serious opposition was given in a letter read from George Hicks, till then one of the most prominent in the movement :—

" I feel certain that to start another union would not
" be the best thing to do at the present time. All the pre-
" judices of the real old staunch Trade Unionists would
" be opposed to us, and however we might desire that
" the new movement should be successful, it would be
" necessary to have the staunch men with us. It is easy
" to get a few dozen men, but that is not industrial
" power, and I feel positive in my own mind that it would
" become nothing less than a propagandist body for
" some time."

This attitude was confirmed by him in person at the end of the conference, but was decisively rejected. There

was no reason to believe, it was felt, that delay would make things any easier, or that two, three, or four years later it would be any simpler to amalgamate the existing unions. The double obstacle of officialdom and apathy was too much. This had been amply proved. Speaker after speaker went over recent events and concluded that they must either found a new union or decide to abandon the task altogether.

When the question of founding the union was put to the vote, therefore, there was no recorded opposition. Forty-four voted in favour, none against, but there were " possibly a few abstentions." The union, it was decided, should be called the Building Workers' Industrial Union (B.W.I.U.). It would have no friendly benefits, nor would it administer the Insurance Act. Internally, provision would be made for the craft spirit by the division of the union into five groups, the first containing roughly woodworkers, the second the constructional trades, the third decorative workers, the fourth the metal workers, and the fifth labourers. J. V. Wills was appointed secretary, John Hamilton organiser. Among the delegates, we should note, there was a surprisingly large proportion of O.S.M. and O.B.S. members, but not a single plasterer.

As the delegates returned home from Birmingham they read in the papers that Great Britain had declared war on Germany.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WAR AND AFTER

OPINIONS ON THE WAR * B.W.I.U. DISSENTS * ATTACK ON THE B.W.I.U. * OLD UNIONS WIN * DEAD YEARS * FEDERATION FORMED * PEACE * AMALGAMATIONS * FEDERATION'S POWER GROWS * 44-HOUR WEEK * BAN ON OVERTIME * BUILDING PARLIAMENT * MR. SPARKES * GREAT ENTHUSIASM * BUILDING GUILD * THE SLUMP * THE MASK OFF * CONCLUSION

1914–1923

ITH the declaration of war the history of the building trades unionists is merged in that of the British working class. The rank and file and the officials took the same view of the causes of the war and the duty of the working class as their rulers. The London lock-out was hastily settled, roughly on the terms offered in June, and all controversial matters were referred to the Boards of Conciliation. Disputes stopped almost altogether. Unemployment increased with the cessation of private building. Building trade workers poured into the army, and their history from 1914 to 1918 is the history of the British Army in Flanders.

Union journals and General Secretaries' addresses for the most part were filled with the same exhortations to strain every nerve to crush the Germans. There were, it is true, some union journals which considered the matter no affair of theirs; like the shopkeepers who posted up "Business as Usual," they seemed to imagine that the foundations of society could be uprooted and

the building unions alone be unaffected. But this was unusual. T. H. Otley (Plasterers) wrote : " Men who should all be working for one ideal, the brotherhood of man, are killing each other. And this is an age of so-called civilisation and Christianity. The irony of it ! Thousands of the poor are being half starved whilst hundreds of the capitalist class are making huge profits." But all this proved the need for " the triumphant victory of Great Britain and her Allies "—a victory pushed home. " A victory for the cause for which we are fighting—i.e., Civilisation and Humanity, is so necessary that we are compelled to continue to the end."* J. Parsonage tried to induce the Painters' Society to expel all interned Germans for being Germans, and denounced bitterly their retention within the Society. " These men," he concluded, " put the question of patriotism and nationality before their trade unionism."† While J. H. Edmiston, of the Operative Plumbers, made no immediate comment upon the war, the Executive in 1917 endorsed the action of Havelock Wilson in preventing Labour Party delegates, suspected of desiring peace, being sent by consent of the Government to Russia, and further recommended to its members Wilson's circular defending himself, which was naturally filled with the violent " patriotic " sentiments favoured by that gentleman.‡ William Matkin, of the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners, again, fiercely parodied Marx and wrote : " This deplorable war has been brought about by an autocratic power and a Government the workers of the world should unite in destroying."

* Plast. Annuals, 1914-16.
† Painters' Quarterly, 1915.
‡ O.P. Annual, 1917.

There were occasional rare dissentients, particularly in the loosely organised General Union. The President of the Southport Branch, Thomason, ascribed the war, in a speech to the lodge, to secret diplomacy, and actually said there was more community of interest between British and German workers than between British workers and employers.* The Liverpool and Birkenhead district committee, in a statement signed by the secretary, Telford, anticipated revolution :—

" Some politicians have declared that to ensure peace " we must be prepared for war, and while others have " denounced this as a false doctrine there is more than a " grain of truth in it, only it will not ensure peace in " the way it was expected. This European war is " leading to political destruction and hence to industrial " emancipation."

Sustained opposition, however, came from the new B.W.I.U., in its *Weekly Bulletin*, later changed into *Solidarity*. It made strenuous efforts to recall the building workers from their preoccupation with the war, to their old antagonism to the employers. It called attention to the profiteering that had already begun and jeered at the promises made to those who enlisted :—

" Many people remember the return of the troops from " South Africa : many maimed and broken and unfit— " and the support given to them ! They had had the " promise of the Government that their families would " be taken care of, but it lasted only so long as the war " lasted, and many men who, so far as the Government " were concerned, had done their day's work, by reason " of their disablements were thrown on the industrial " scrap-heap, without assistance or employment."†

* G.U. Monthly, 1915, September ; 1915, March.
† Bulletin, 5.9.14. Hamilton.

Quite soon after the outbreak of war—in October, 1914—it issued an article under the heading of "Long live the International!" and summed up its attitude to the war in the famous words of Tom Paine: "The world is my country, to do good my religion." Without any direct pacifist argument about war-guilt or the Kaiser, it made every effort in prose and verse* to recall the workers from the imperialist war to the class war. Mr. W. Tyson Wilson, M.P., who carried great weight in the A.S.C.J., made in the December, 1914, issue of its Monthly Journal, a sentimental appeal to the members to abandon trade union safeguards :—

"May I suggest to our members that in this great "national emergency when the country is in danger "they might allow a little elasticity in their working "rules. We should remember that our fellow workmen

* As, for example, in *Solidarity* :—

STEPPING HEAVENWARDS

(At the Foleshill District Council it was said that owing to the scarcity of labour, employers were themselves compelled to carry bricks to the scaffolding of buildings.)

Yes, the Kaiser is to blame
If Fat has to work, the same
As the bloque who earns his living :
It's a howling, rotten shame,
For his shoulder blades get sore,
And he sweats at every pore,
And he curses, past forgiving,
As he never cursed before.

Still, Fat didn't ought to "blind"
Since each cloud is silver-lined.
Let him take this fact for granted
For the easing of his mind :
He's a dam sight nearer God
When he's carrying up the hod
Than he'll be when he is planted
In a box beneath the sod !

Gadfly

" in the trenches are fighting our battles ; that they get " no time and a quarter, or time and a half, or double " for Sunday ; that thousands of them are discharged " without a moment's notice and will never want a job " again ; therefore let us try and do our duty here as " bravely and unselfishly as our brothers at the front are " doing theirs.—W. T. Wilson, M.P."

(Such action would in fact have aided the prosecution of the war little, but mightily increased profits.) On this letter the B.W.I.U. Bulletin commented :—

" Might we suggest to Mr. Wilson that he offers the " same advice, when Parliament opens, to the ship- " owners ? Although this War has only been going on " for 5 months, the workers are getting a lesson in " patriotism. Rotten meat, bad butter, famine prices, " scamped huts and increased poverty are already in- " scribed on its banner. In war as in peace the patriotism " of the capitalist is his profits."

But the B.W.I.U. was a solitary and soon a weakening voice. The experiment of founding a new union could only have been successful under one condition—that there was a sufficient wave of enthusiasm early in its career to bring it to first rank among unions and dwarf the older societies. Even then it would have had to come to some compromise in the end. Trade Unions are very hard to kill. Even the A.S.C.J., with every card in its hand, failed to kill the General Union in 1878, and the task of the B.W.I.U. of killing the whole lot of craft unions was infinitely heavier. Only desperation of other methods had driven the industrial unionists to it. But that necessary wave of enthusiasm never came. The war killed the B.W.I.U. Men were thinking of far other things than the advantages of industrial unionism. The new union started well enough with twenty-one

branches, two executive members from the Stonemasons, arrangements for exchange of cards with the South Wales miners and the brewery workers, and picked up quickly four little local clubs.* There its progress stopped dead. Its figures of membership were not published, but the fact that the absence of George Hicks, one man, was discussed at such length suggests it was not considerable. Some—indeed, perhaps, the majority—of the delegates to the Birmingham Conference never joined the union.

What unemployment and lack of interest began, the persecution of the older unions achieved. A campaign of great bitterness was organised. In November, 1915, the B.W.I.U. official organ, *Solidarity*, wrote with evident vexation :—

" Since the Building Workers Industrial Union came " into existence many despicable methods have been " adopted by the craft union leaders towards us and " many attempts have been made, with little success, to " get our men discharged.

" They have approached foremen and managers of " the jobs where our men have been employed. They " have raised objections to our ticket. They have asked " that our men should be sacked. They have refused on " every occasion to allow us to put our position. No " method has been too mean or dirty or unscrupulous " for them to use to defeat us."†

The leader in the attack upon the B.W.I.U. was Parsonage, the Painters' secretary, who had been so sharply brought to heel by the same industrial unionists in 1912, and it would have been unnatural if some

* London Society of Plumbers, London and Provincial Federation of Painters, Liverpool Glaziers, Liverpool Signwriters.

† *Solidarity*, 20/11/15.

personal feeling had not entered in. He was ardently seconded by the other secretaries. Parsonage called together, on behalf of his union, a meeting of building trades officials at Sheffield in September, 1914, for the purpose of fighting the B.W.I.U. All the principal unions* attended in the persons of their secretaries or executive members. The primary object of the Conference was at once agreed upon, the delegate of the A.S.C.J. apologising for his members' laxity in allowing certain B.W.I.U. men to work on a job because it was war work. Double membership, on which the B.W.I.U. had pinned some hopes, was killed. The O.B.S. forbade any B.W.I.U. member to be permitted to take any part in any branch business.† The Painters' Society went further and expelled altogether anyone who joined the B.W.I.U. So zealous was Parsonage that a member of his London District Council who had spoken in favour of the new union was compelled to write out twice and sign a renunciation.‡ These efforts were eagerly seconded by the rank and file, particularly of carpenters, bricklayers and painters. The B.W.I.U. organiser, Hamilton, in accepting office, had said queerly : " I feel keenly the opprobrium you have thrust upon me in appointing me organiser."§ His words were very soon explained. By founding the B.W.I.U. the rebels had merely drained the unions. They had sucked out of them all the best and livest elements, leaving the reactionaries in undisputed control. Things were consequently done

* A.S.C.J., G.U., O.B.S., A.O.S.M., Woodcutting Machinists, Slaters, Manchester Unity, Electrical T.U., U.B.L.U., Painters.

† Bricklayers, A.M.G.C., 1915.

‡ Painters' Quarterly, September, 1914.

§ "This was an error in the minutes : what I said was *approbation.* However, the event made the mistake appropriate."—Note of J. Hamilton to the author.

which could not have happened two years before. The B.W.I.U. secretary and the organiser were never allowed to turn their attention to building up the union. All their efforts were taken up by fighting persecution and begging obstinate members of the other unions to let their members work. At the 1916 (June) Conference of the B.W.I.U. dissensions had become so acute that the secretary had been forced to resign, but resumed office on the request of the Conference. One branch had been lost; there were now only twenty, and of these four were refusing to pay any money. There were only two branches outside London all told (Liverpool and Leigh). From the date of this Conference the failure of the B.W.I.U. became clear. Conscription drove its most active members into the Army, prison, or hiding. There are still a number of London members of the union, but as a national society it was stamped out in the first years of the war.

The destruction of the B.W.I.U. is almost all there is to record in building trade history during the war. Building proper being stopped, the strictly building unions for the most part resumed their slow decay. The masons sank as low as five thousand. The plasterers at one time levied themselves ten shillings a head in a lump; their membership fell from over 8,000 to 5,700. The unions which had a membership in industries used in the war, naturally stood still or increased. The painters had risen from sixteen thousand to thirty thousand, largely because of the Insurance Act, and this they increased by another five thousand. The Scottish Painters' Society rose from five to six thousand.* The Plumbers' membership fluctuated about twelve thousand. The A.S.C.J. membership rose from eighty-five

* L.R.D.

thousand to a hundred and twenty-four thousand. Unions whose members were employed in the war-time steel and concrete constructional work prospered, Builders' Labourers' unions especially. The United Builders' Labourers' Union's membership skyrocketted from 5,300 in 1916 to 27,000 the next year. But so far as these unions had any history, it was outside the building industry. The A.S.C.J. and the Plumbers in particular were involved in a tedious and complex struggle with the Ministry of Munitions to preserve their working rules, in the end successful; but this is outside our sphere.

The official negotiations about amalgamation had been rudely interrupted by the industrial unionists. They were now resumed, as slow, ceremonious and solemn as a minuet, and about as useful. At the outbreak of war negotiations for amalgamation between the U.B.L.U. and the United Order of General Labourers had fallen through under circumstances that suggested ill-will on the part of officials of the latter body. The Plumbers and the Heating Engineers, having failed to come to an agreement, also resumed their previous conflict. Everything was like old times. So, too, were the negotiations. There were discussions on amalgamation, first between the United Builders' Labourers and the National Association, then, under the auspices of the General Federation of Trades Unions, between a larger group of general unions. These lasted throughout 1916 and 1917, without any result. In 1916 also, the various stone-working unions—the English and Scottish masons, the Aberdeen Society, and the Street Paviors—met and discussed amalgamation. Favourable opinions were expressed and nothing was heard of the project again.* The Operative Bricklayers' Society intervened,

* S.O.M. Journal, July, 1919.

with a project for the union of the plasterers, masons and bricklayers. This also was abandoned. It then approached the Manchester Unity. G. H. Clarke was dead, and his place was taken by John Gregory. But this time the London Order made unreasonable conditions. They would not allow temporary representation for the Manchester men during absorption, nor promise not to close their branches up, nor make any provision for their officers. They also insisted on the name of the O.B.S. being adopted. Under such conditions, naturally, the Manchester Order declined. Correspondence on unity was exchanged in 1915 and 1916 between the two joiners' societies, as a result of which the General Union came to the conclusion that it would take no action.

In the later years of the war, however, a definite step forward was made. The Russian revolution abroad, the shop stewards' movement at home, together with the suffering of the workers, had produced a great ferment in the British working class. No direct trace of this is to be found in the building trades, but some effect it must have had. Anyway, a step forward was made—the foundation of the Federation. The Council called together by Parsonage to kill the B.W.I.U. had adjourned, not dissolved, and constituted itself the "National Associated Building Trades Council." This was insultingly referred to by the rebels in the unions as a place "where General Secretaries sleep together." Its powers were extremely limited. It only met quarterly, could only consider matters referred to it by the separate executives concerned, and could not hold extra meetings except on the request of two or more executives. It was, in fact, purely an arrangement for mutual consultation by permanent officials. Its proceedings are not of great importance until the end of 1916, when the Amalgamated

Society of Carpenters and Joiners presented to it a scheme of Federation, much the same as the one that had been rejected in 1913. It, like the other scheme, "united officials and not the rank and file." It provided for an assembly of official delegates, sent by executives, who should have no power but that specifically delegated to them. The autonomy of the unions was hardly touched, nor was the subscription required of them heavy enough to tie them. At any time any union could break away.

The scheme was suspected and denounced by the remaining industrial unionists. They regarded it as yet another attempt to burke amalgamation :—

"Who are the proposers ?

"If you have been a careful observer of the tendencies during the past three years, you will have seen gradually building up a sort of General Secretaries' Union existing under the bold title of Associated Building Trades Council. This is the body, so far as I can see, that has propounded this 'wonderful' scheme.

"Might I ask who has asked them for it ? also, what right have they to attempt to exploit the absence of many staunch supporters of amalgamation who to-day are serving with the colours ? . . . The proposal abounds with the possibilities of making you bigger slaves to officialdom than ever."*

Nevertheless, after an infinitely tedious process of voting and discussion the project was approved by most of the main unions† and the others adhered to it soon after. The Council held its last meeting in January,

* Letter of George Hicks, August, 1917, O.B.S. Monthly.

† A.S.C.J., G.U., O.S.M., U.B.L.U., Slaters, Plumbers, Manchester Unity, Painters, N.A. Builders' Labourers.

1918, and the Federation was set up, district by district, that year, holding its first national session in the late spring. Very quickly, with or without the desire of its founders, the Federation in the nature of things began to take over the negotiation and direction of the more important affairs. Signs were not wanting that the seat of power, by the mere logic of industrial conditions, was being moved from the sectional unions to the Federation, but this process could not become obvious until after the conclusion of peace. This also applies to another development, the "Building Trade Parliament," which, founded during the war, did not attain its full development until afterwards. We must postpone for a moment the consideration of both of these.

The effect of peace upon the building trades unions was like spring upon an icebound river. The obstacles which war-time inertia had let remain were rapidly removed and quick movement followed. The clique of general secretaries which had withstood the industrial unionists, was found to have disappeared. Death or resignation had, by 1920, removed almost every representative of the old order, whether opponent or supporter of industrial unionism, and in most cases the new secretary was one who could be trusted to lay no obstacles in the way of closer unity. There was, as in 1889-92, a rapid change of personnel. J. Parsonage died in 1918, and his place as the Painters' Secretary was taken by J. A. Gibson. G. H. Clarke had died just before the outbreak of war ; his post in the Manchester Unity was occupied by John Gregory. William Matkin (G.U.) died in 1920. J. H. Edmiston of the Plumbers resigned, and his place was taken by Lachlan MacDonald, John Batchelor (O.B.S.) gave way to

George Hicks, Francis Chandler of the A.S.C.C.J.* to A. G. Cameron. The last prominent representative of the old order was lost in 1922, when the sudden death of T. H. Otley made vacant the Plasterers' general secretaryship. (His successor was A. H. Telling.) This collapse of the old, much abused bureaucracy, and the return of numerous building workers from the war in no placid or reactionary temper, made possible in two years reconstruction of union machinery which had utterly baffled reformers for twenty years. The industrial union was not achieved, but sectional amalgamations of great apparent difficulty were carried through. This was much assisted by the amendment of the law which removed the " two-thirds " rule. The deepest and most inflamed cut was healed when, after sixty years' enmity, the Amalgamated Society and General Union of Carpenters and Joiners fused in the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers at the end of 1920. In 1919 the Operative Stonemasons and the Manchester Unity of Bricklayers agreed upon a basis of amalgamation. This had not been put to the membership before the London O.B.S. asked to be admitted to the negotiations. In consequence a larger conference, including the Plasterers and Slaters, was held. Although the greater amalgamation was not achieved, a great step forward was made when, at the end of the year, a plan of amalgamation between the Stonemasons and the two Bricklayers' Orders was agreed upon. On January 1, 1921, the new union, the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers, started life. It had not merely repaired the almost accidental split of 1848, but had for the first time united two crafts in one union. It is significant

* The extra initial is due to the absorption of the Cabinet Makers, a further extension outside building.

that the Birmingham branch of the Manchester Order, which as the Old Guard opposed to the end, produced various reasons, such as alleged neglect of old members and dislike of the shorter week, but reserved its loudest laments for the disappearance of the demarcation quarrels with the masons.* In Scotland, at the end of 1919, the Trades Union Congress presided over an attempt to amalgamate the Slaters, Plasterers, and the various stonecutting unions.† This large plan did not materialise, but amalgamation was achieved between the Scottish Operative Masons, the Aberdeen Granite Workers, and two smaller stoneworkers' societies, which formed the Building and Monumental Workers' Association of Scotland. Negotiations between the Heating Engineers and the Plumbers in 1919 unfortunately collapsed, leaving fresh ill-feeling behind, but in 1920 the Scottish breakaway was healed, and the two societies combined in the United Operative Plumbers' and Domestic Engineers' Association. In the case of the builders' labourers there was less success. The Federation, whose powers were growing every day, refused to admit the labourers unless they fused, and four societies—the Navvies' Union, the U.B.L.U., the National Association of Builders' Labourers, and the United Order of General Labourers—entered into negotiations. Unfortunately, Colonel Ward returned from abroad and stopped the negotiations by his union (Navvies), and the United Order also withdrew. Nevertheless, a large portion of the members of both passed over into the new body, which was about to be inaugurated when an obscure quarrel broke out between the United Builders' Labourers and the National Association. Each side

* Unity Journal, December, 1920.

† S. Plast., 1920.

accused the other of malpractices. As a result, there are now two "Builders' Labourers' and Constructional Workers' Societies," the "National" (the old U.B.L.U.) and the "Altogether."

Even more important, perhaps, was the increase in the power of the Federation. There are two methods of arriving at industrial unionism in the building trades—amalgamation of the various unions and increasing the powers of the Federation. These are not mutually exclusive. There is no reason why both should not go on together. The Federation itself, while increasing its own power, has promoted a "Committee for the Amalgamation of Cognate Trades." From 1918 onwards the power of the Federation has steadily increased and its annual meetings have become more and more like conferences of one union. Withdrawals have been threatened—in 1920 the A.S.C.C.J. said it would withdraw unless increased representation was given to it, and the Plumbers for a time actually did hold aloof—and one (Scottish Plasterers) has actually occurred. But for the most part its powers have increased by consent. The creation of Area Councils has strengthened its power in the country. More important is the formation of "composite branches" in country districts which were previously unorganised because no one craft could raise sufficient members for a branch. Branches mixing all crafts are now set up, directly dependent upon the Federation, though the individual subscriptions are sorted out and sent to the proper unions. These composite branches are most valuable in organising "black spots" in the countryside and stopping a steady trickle of underpaid blackleg labour into the towns. They are of even more importance in making the Federation a reality, as they provide a real basis for it in contact with the rank and

file. Composite branches are necessarily devoted first to the Federation. While a strong plumbers' lodge (say) might regard the dissolution of the Federation as merely the breaking of a link with other unions, a composite branch could only think of it as a rending apart of the very fabric of building unionism.

Even more significant, perhaps, has been the way in which the Federation concentrated in its hands the direction of the great forward movements after the war. In 1919 and 1920 great prosperity and the boom in building meant the masters had real need of the men. Union membership shot up. The O.B.S. in the latter year passed 42,000, the U.B.L.U. reached 51,000, and the "Altogether" claimed 100,000. The Painters passed 72,000, the Plasterers 14,000, the A.S.C.C.J. touched 140,000, and even the Stonemasons recovered to eleven thousand. This new strength was exercised through the Federation, and its greatest achievement was the gaining of the eight-hour day, 44-hour week, in 1920. The honour of this victory is disputed, but the priority of Scotland is certain. In 1919 operatives and masters, at a conference called by the Scottish Wages Board, agreed upon a 44-hour week, but could not agree upon the demand of the workers for the old pay (50 hours) for the new week. It was referred to the Court of Arbitration, with a minute (drafted by the operative side) which made probable the decision given in favour of the workers. Great efforts were made to get the operatives' delegates to vary the form of the demand, so that the minute could be ignored, but the decision was given for 44 hours and 50 hours' pay. Once the break was made by the Scottish Operatives, the National Federation pushed forward to the more difficult task of getting the 44 hours nationally. A ballot of the workers

was taken in 1919, and in 1920 the masters gave way without a battle. Moreover—a significant point—Labour Day, May 1, was made a national holiday to celebrate the advance.

The value of this victory lay in the fact that shorter hours were a gain that could not be evaded, while money increases were automatically lost by changing prices. Other things being equal, it is probable that even under capitalism efficient unions will secure a certain minimum real wage for their members (however the currency may shift about) for their working week, whether it is short or long. Consequently, a shorter working week could be a real gain, if it was observed. But here the Federation's worst enemies were in the rank and file, which had been corrupted by the hourly-payment system. Many members regarded shorter hours, not so much as more leisure, but as an opportunity for more overtime. In this they were seconded by the masters. The Federation, in a circular to members, wrote truly :—

" There are persons who, having made huge profits " during the war, are now extending their business " premises and luxury buildings in preference to dis- " gorging their gains by paying the excess profits duty. " The few coppers extra for overtime would not affect " these people : even were it doubled they would gladly " pay it. It has a three-fold advantage for them. They " get their premises up quick and start profit-making " again. They dodge the Excess Profit Duty, and—from " their point of view the greatest advantage—they suc- " ceed by insidious methods in securing the help of the " workman to break down his own 44-hour week. It " matters not how much they pay for extra time—they " almost invariably get that back by increase of prices,

" but the increase of comfort and leisure secured to the " operative by a shorter working day is something they " are unable to recover."*

In the end it courageously imposed a " ban on overtime," which, often grudgingly and with certain exceptions, was observed. The " shorter hours " victory became a real victory.

Again, throughout 1919 and 1920 the Federation was faced by a persistent attempt at " dilution " on the part of the Government, backed by a Press campaign of scandalous falsehoods. Efforts were made to intimidate the operatives by organising ex-soldier sentiment against them ; fortunately with little success. The Federation was able to prevent the flooding of the industry with unskilled labour, in the interests of the masters, and secured that dilution only took place gradually, after proper training and with due safeguards. It was not, however, successful in its parallel task of inducing the Government to deal with the " rings " formed by employers in the building trades which so forced up prices as to halve the amount of building done.

In this period of prosperity two experiments of great interest were made—the Building Guild and the Building Trades Parliament. The Building Trades Parliament arose partly from the pre-war schemes of conciliation, and the National Demarcation scheme, adopted in 1915.†

* Circular of the N.F.B.T.O., "A ban on Overtime," 5/10/20.

† The constitution of the latter was an exhibition of trade union weakness. The masters' side (complete) consisted of the National Federation of Building Trade Employers and the Master Slaters, Plasterers and Plumbers. The operatives' side (incomplete) consisted of the O.S.M., Manchester Unity, A.S.C.J., General Union, Operative Plasterers, Slaters and Tilers, Heating and Domestic Engineers, Navvies' Union, U.B.L.U., National Association of Builders' Labourers, Builders and General Labourers' Union, A.S. Woodcutting Machinists, Cabinet Makers, O.B.S., N.A.S.O.H.A.S.P.A.D., Electrical Trades Union.

In 1916 there seemed a likelihood of a dispute, and on this occasion a master builder, Malcolm Sparkes, who had been much dissatisfied with the condition of class war prevailing in the building trades and the sufferings of the workers, approached the London members of the A.S.C.J. by a letter to S. Stennett, outlining a plan for permanent co-operation and not mere conciliation, which would ultimately make the industry a public service, and not a competitive trade. His letter was sent on to the Building Trades Council before mentioned, containing most of the general secretaries, and Sparkes also addressed the meeting in person, advocating the formation of a " Parliament " of employers and employed which should be the " expression of a desire on the part of the organised employers and operatives to render their full share of service towards the creation of a new and better industrial order."

The proposals were circulated, and in the end approved, and at the end of 1916 submitted to the National Federation of Building Trade Employers by the Building Trades Council, and signed by the representatives of most large unions.* Great enthusiasm was expressed by many, and trade union leaders who had previously felt that the only thing to do was to fight the employer were influenced by Mr. Sparkes's eloquence to change their views.

" The discussion was opened by Mr. W. Bradshaw. " He declared that until recently he had been hostile to " the scheme, believing that the interests of the opera- " tives were necessarily and inevitably opposed to " those of the employers, and that the only thing to do

* A.S.C.J., General Union, O.S.M., O.B.S., N.A.S.O.H.A.S.P.A.D., U.B.L.U., N.A.B.L., Manchester Unity, A.S. Woodcutting Machinists, Slaters, Furnishing Trades Association, Electrical Trades Association.

" was to develop their fighting organisation until they " could dictate their terms. But during the last few weeks " his opinions had undergone a change. He did believe in " the power of goodwill, and was certain that if we got " the right institutions we should get the right men for " them. Moreover, the scheme appealed to him as being " something that could be achieved at once."*

Although Mr. Sparkes was removed to prison as a conscientious objector in 1917, his scheme went forward. The demands of war had thinned the ranks of the operatives. Labour was scarce, and remained scarce till 1921. The workers were in a strong position. The employers were prepared to consent to anything which would eliminate or lessen disputes and possibly also decrease the workers' demands. The " Builders' Parliament " preceded in time, but was rapidly assimilated to the larger scheme of Whitley Councils which from 1917 onwards began to be set up in every industry, with the stated object of securing industrial peace for ever. In the covering letter to the scheme submitted to the masters the operatives' representatives observed :—

" Both employers and employed have been the un- " willing victims of a system of antagonism that has " organised industry on the lines of a tug of war and " permeated the whole national life with sectional habits " of thought and outlook. Wherever coercion has been " applied by one side against the other, it has called forth " a resistance that otherwise might never have arisen, " and has led to much sterility and waste."†

The master Painters and the N.A.S.O.H.A.S.P.A.D. got in before the rest by setting up a joint council in February, 1917, which is still operating and has done

* Garton, p. 29. Discussion at the Council.

† Introduction to the scheme for the Builders' Parliament.

good work in the matter of technical education. The larger scheme was agreed to in the summer of 1917 by the master builders. The introductory statement did not go so far as to say that the interests of masters and men were identical, but it strongly hinted it :—

" ARGUMENT : the interests of employers and em-
" ployed are in some respects opposed ; but they have a
" common interest in promoting the efficiency and
" status of the service in which they are engaged, and in
" advancing the well-being of its personnel."

The subject of the Parliament's agenda included :—

" Regularisation of wages—Prevention of unemploy-
" ment—Employment of Partially disabled Soldiers—
" Technical Training and Research—Continuous and
" Progressive improvement—Publicity."

Its name was altered to the " Industrial Council for the Building Industry," to fit in with the Whitley scheme, and the first meeting was held on May 29, 1918. The greatest enthusiasm was displayed ; the founders might well have said, with the complacency of Robert Owen : " The end of the old world and the commencement of the new are decided." The nearest approach to scepticism was shown by a builders' labourers' delegate, who asked :—

" How many shareholders would be satisfied to be
" told there was not the same percentage of profit as
" before—' but look at the much better buildings we are
" putting up ! ' For that matter, how many co-
" operators were pleased to hear that the dividends had
" gone down because the wages of the employees had
" gone up ? Whilst one might have ideals it was neces-
" sary to recognise the things that one was up against.
" The building trade was not in itself master of the situ-
" ation, but was co-related and intertwined with every

" other industry in the country. . . . While we had the " present system it was useless to talk about artistry " and idealism. But if one result of their meeting " was to convert employers to the view that the " present system was a rotten one and ought to be " altered, then the Building Trades Parliament would " do some good."*

The Parliament worked, nominally at least, for four and a half years. Great hopes were pinned to it. It did a certain amount of good in levelling up wages in backward districts, a process in which the large employers were interested as well as the men. It promoted " good feeling," and a belief on the part of the operatives that the control over the industry which they desired might be achieved constitutionally. In the matter of technical education, it and the subsidiary councils have an excellent record.

In August, 1919, the " Foster Report " was presented to the Parliament. This report, piloted through by Mr. Thomas Foster, a master painter who had been an early supporter of the scheme, was a real attempt to achieve the objects named in the constitution. It would have eliminated " speculative profit " altogether. It would have made the industry a fixed whole, not a fluid competitive mass. The employer would have had a fixed profit, and, in fact, have become only a manager. This report was somewhat strong meat for the employers ; it was adopted, but not put into operation. Nevertheless, it was hoped that their prejudices would in time mellow.†

The National Building Guild, formed on July 23, 1921, was also the outcome of propaganda beginning during

* Speech of J. Jones (U.O.G.L.) at first meeting. Garton, 65

† Garton.

the war. The National Guilds League, originally, was a sort of modified syndicalist body, which urged, from 1915 onwards, the unions of Great Britain to prepare to take over the control of industry, and each to run its own industry democratically in conjunction with the State. The exact method of this revolution was left uncertain, and the organisation contained people of all political opinions, from Communists to extreme reactionaries. Its propaganda had a notable effect upon the building trades, and the atmosphere created by the "Parliament" was suitable to its growth. Almost simultaneously at the beginning of 1920 "Guilds" were formed in Manchester and London, under the direction of the District Councils of the operatives' Federation.

These two Guilds, as has been said, were later united into one. The attitude of the Federation was cautious; it merely said it "observes with interest the advent of the Building Guild and regards it as a valuable experiment." The London Guild, and afterwards the National Guild, never fell into the trap of the "self-governing workshop." The unions affiliated to the Federation appointed the directing Board, which was thus responsible not to the immediate employer, but to all the building workers of London. The Board had power to co-opt, and thus secured architects and surveyors. The Guild, both locally and nationally, was soon in full swing. Houses were built under excellent conditions. Their quality was undeniably good, and the presence of an employer in the market who paid for wet time, and granted all the other alleviations so long demanded, pushed up the general standard. Mistakes were made, but perhaps the most important achievement of the Guild was that it gave the workers of the building

industry confidence and showed them that they were competent to run and control the industry, if only they could lay their hands on it.

All this is written in the past tense. With the change in industrial conditions, the slump which again put the operative in a position of weakness as against the employer, the fair-weather Parliament and Guild disappeared. The first blow to the Guild was the cessation of the official support given to it by the Ministry of Health, and the abandonment of the Government housing scheme, which gravely affected building as a whole. As trade conditions got worse, the Guild found itself in financial difficulties, as all such experiments in time must, through business inexperience and its capital being too small and its commitments and enterprises too large. In 1922 it was practically closed down.

The educational scheme of the new A.U.B.T.W. was another sign of the new, and on the whole healthier and more realist, atmosphere. A shilling a head levy is paid for educational purposes, and the scheme is operated in connection with the National Council of Labour Colleges, and the classes are run upon the principles of that body, the offspring of the Plebs League. The intention is that the workers should take their own education in their own hands, for the express purpose of acquiring not " knowledge " generally, but knowledge that will assist them to drive out the employer.* The attractions offered by a rival organisation, which extends University culture to the workers, were rejected. The character of the scheme as a whole is a further indication of the beginning of a period of intenser class war.

* "What is the use of having a trade union ticket in your pocket, if your Boss has your HEAD in HIS ? "—Plebs motto on first A.U.B.T.W Education Leaflet.

The fate of the Building Parliament was more ignoble than the Guild's. Even before serious conflict had begun, its usefulness had been gravely doubted : it had no power.* The slump of 1921 in the end killed it. It will be remembered that in that year the employers' attack was begun by the coalowners upon the miners. The decision of the leaders of the transport and railway workers not to come to the miners' assistance (" Black Friday ") meant certain defeat, and it was generally realised that the disaster would in time involve the building trades. The attitude of the leaders was fiercely criticised : " They betrayed their comrades," commented Mr. Lachlan MacDonald (Plumbers' General Secretary) in pointing out the inevitable reaction upon the building workers.† It was not long before the master builders had removed the mask they had worn. In 1922 they demanded large cuts, estimated to have worked out on the average at 8d. an hour ; and it is interesting to observe that, while during their good period the operatives agreed to the establishment of the " sliding scale " of the National Wages and Conditions Council, the employers did not observe it when their turn came. The cuts that were enforced went entirely outside those limits. The Federation was not able to resist, and in the consequent strain upon it the Scottish Plasterers broke away and fought on their own. Though the " Parliament " had long ceased to function usefully, the employers, nevertheless, at the beginning of 1923, felt it wise to destroy it by withdrawing, and gave a last kick at the " Foster report," which they had once been forced to listen to. " The master builders were asked, with consummate impertinence (or was it colossal ignorance ?),

* Plasterers' Annual, 1921.

† O.P. Monthly, May, 1921.

to join in a game of French Revolutions, and all they had to do was to place their heads under the guillotine. So simple ! All the master builder had to do was to hand over the property which he owned to those who did not. This was not highway robbery, because it was Guild Socialism !"* As this history is being written, the masters have presented a demand for piecework rates, lower wages and longer hours, avowedly intended to reduce the building operative to the terrible conditions shown in some other industries.

Here this book must end. It has not been possible to give more than the barest outline of recent events, nor has the time come when we can comment freely upon them. The period that has just ended is not without certain lessons for us. Although neither Mr. Sparkes nor Mr. Foster was insincere in his efforts, it is clear that the attitude assumed by the employers at the Building Parliament was for many no more than a disguise put on while they had need of the operatives. Their attitude to-day should warn us to beware of thinking that control of the industry can be achieved by any method of conciliation and constitutionalism. " We are respected *only* when we are feared," and the building workers can attain their victory only by reliance upon their own strength, not upon any appeals to the masters' better nature. That this strength is nothing like so great as it should be, appears clearly from the past history. Things have been worse, but with fourteen large unions (omitting small) in the industry they cannot be called satisfactory. The growth of concrete building, for example, is still steadily eating away the livelihood of bricklayers and masons, without it being possible to see

* The *Builder*, January 19, 1923. Article by H. B. Newbold, Organising Secretary to the Employers' Federation.

that concreting is carried on under no worse conditions than bricklaying and masonry. Instead, because of the absence of an industrial union, concretors' wages remain for the most part those of general labourers. Amalgamation of the unions confined to the building trades is at any rate possible, and would be the beginning of an attempt to deal with this problem. For those crafts, such as painting, plumbing and joinery, which extend outside building, the problem is more difficult. It is not solved by the exaggeration of "cognate unionism." This is a theory on which it has been argued, within the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, that the union should include all who work in wood in all industries. Feelers have even been thrown out for the absorption of the patternmakers. But such an extension is an increase of weakness, not of strength. The woodworkers by themselves can have no real control over engineering. Even the most conservative ex-secretary of the Patternmakers, W. Mosses, tells his members their day of independence is over and their union policy is really directed "from the A.E.U. offices in Peckham Road."* The Plumbers, in their recent experience in the engineering lock-out, had a clear proof of this; their funds were drained in a dispute over which they had no control. Peace or war in the engineering industry was settled by the attitude of the A.E.U. and one or two other large unions; the plumbers counted for nothing; and when abused for extravagance on the one hand, or for pusillanimity on the other, the executive could have replied truly that the decision was not in their hands. While it is not reasonable to expect the unions concerned to shed their engineering and shipbuilding members, nor true to say that ships' painters' wages do

*"History of the United Patternmakers," by W. Mosses, J.P., 1922.

not concern housepainters, nevertheless the members of the unions concerned should consider as their ultimate objective a Builders' Industrial Union, containing an Engineering and Shipbuilding subsection which should protect the crafts in that industry until satisfactory arrangements are made there too. Such should be their ultimate aim ; immediately, there is no reason why the trade activities, and trade subscriptions, of the various unions should not be entrusted (so far as building is concerned) to the Federation, in view of the immediate attack by the masters. The Federation could then deal with all strictly trade matters, and, in time, might evolve into a Confederation upon the lines of the Steel Trades.*

Finally, however, no organisation that merely unites executives and not the rank and file can be satisfactory. The Federation must, in time, be based upon joint meetings of the various crafts in the locality. Until it is so founded it can be split up like the Operative Builders' Union of 1833. In the end sectional amalgamations and strengthening of the Federation, two movements, should meet together and culminate in one industrial union.

Nor is that all. The industrial unionists erred, we now see, in neglecting the State. Though they rightly argued that the freedom of the workers could never come through the State, they failed to see that the State was capitalism's policeman and protector, and must be disarmed. Political action, and the support by the building operatives of a class-conscious Labour Party, are needed ; only by both political and industrial action can the workers secure control of their job and that

* An account of this is given in G. D. H. Cole's "Introduction to Trade Unionism."

freedom from the master without which they can secure nothing. By the resolute use of both weapons, by swift and relentless action they may succeed. They will not succeed alone, for when the building workers are free, the rest of the workers of England will be wage-slaves no longer, but working together for the common good in freedom and fellowship. And, as was said many hundred years ago, "fellowship is life and lack of fellowship is death."

APPENDICES

I. Wages in the Building Trades.

II. Membership of two Unions.

III. Abbreviations of Societies' names: List of Secretaries.

IV. The O.B.U. Manifesto, 1833.

V. Sole surviving circular of the O.B.U., 1833.

VI. Bricklayers: Lockett's Letter to Bolton, 1855.

VII. Industrial Unionism: Syllabus of Lecture. (O.B.S., 1912.)

APPENDIX I.—WAGES IN THE BUILDING TRADES

(*a*) Table of rates of wages in the building industry 1778-1920. Computed per day on the basis of a 10-hour day.[1]

	Carpenters, Masons Bricklayers		*Plumbers*		*Plasterers*		*Labourers*	
	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.		s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.
1778	2 6	— 3 0	3 0		3 0		1 8	— 1 10
1788	[2]3 0		3 0		3 0	— 3 6	1 10	
1790	[2]3 0		3 0		3 0		1 10	
1794	3 4		3 0		3 0		1 10	
1796	[3]3 4		3 0		3 0	— 3 6	1 10	— 2 3[4]
1797	3 4	— 3 8[5]	3 0		3 6		2 3	
1801	[6]3 8	— 4 5	4 0		4 4	— 4 6	2 5	
1803	4 9	— 5 0[7]	4 0		4 6		2 5	
1808	4 10	— 5 0	4 6		5 6		2 5	
1826–47	5 0		5 0		5 0		3 0	
1853–61	5 0		5 0		5 0		3 0	
1861–65	5 10		5 10		5 10		3 6½	
1865–66	6 3		6 3		6 3		3 9	
1866–72	6 8		6 8		6 8		3 11½	
1872–73	7 1		7 1		7 1		4 4½	
1873–78	7 6		7 6		7 6		4 9½	
1914	8 7½		9 0		8 7½		6 0[8]	
1920	18 8		19 0		18 8		16 8[9]	

(1) From W. Hardy in the *Operative Builder*, Vol. 1, No. 4, amended.
(2) Some bricklayers received 3*s.* 4*d.*
(3) Bricklayers' wage raised to 3*s.* 4*d.*—3*s.* 8*d.* in July, 1796.
(4) Labourers' wage raised to 2*s.* 3*d.* in July, 1796.
(5) Bricklayers only.
(6) Wages increased between January and July, 1801.
(7) Masons only received 5*s.*
(8) For nine-hour day.
(9) For eight-hour day.

(*b*) Average wages of operative builders 1834-66, as computed in the *Balance Sheet* of 1872 (A.S.W. various).

	Per Week	*Hours*	*Per Hour*
1834	27*s.*—30*s.*	60	5½*d.*—6*d.*
1847	30*s.*	58½	6½*d.*
1853	33*s.*	58½	6¾*d.*
1861	33*s.*	56½	7*d.*
1866	37*s.* 8*d.*	56½	8*d.*

APPENDIX II.—MEMBERSHIP OF TWO TYPICAL BUILDING UNIONS DURING THE PERIOD 1833 TO 1919.

Year	*Operative Stone Masons*	*Amalgamated Society of Carp. & Joiners*	*Notes*
1833	6,000	...	
1834	3,650	...	*Decline of great O.B.U.*
1835	1,678	...	
1837	5,590	...	*Thomas Shortt, Secretary O.S.M.*
1841	3,709	...	
1843	2,144	...	*Fall of Shortt*
1845	4,861	...	*Good trade*
1848	6,741	...	*Rich'd Harnott, Sec'y, O.S.M.*
1850	4,671	...	
1852	5,695	...	
1854	9,125	...	
1856	8,423	...	
1858	8,786	...	
1860	9,125	618	*End of Nine-hours movement*
1862	9,628	949	*Applegarth, Secretary A.S.C.J.*
1863	10,529	1,718	*Good trade*
1864	13,035	3,279	*The International*
1866	17,762	8,002	
1868	18,281	8,736	
1870	13,965	10,178	
1872	18,411	11,236	*Prior, Secretary A.S.C.J.* *Death of Harnott* *Nine-hours movement*
1874	23,619	13,817	
1876	26,330	16,038	*Broadhurst, Secy. to T.U.C.*
1879	19,611	17,034	*Great Depression*
1882	11,550	20,622	*Murchie, Secy. A.S.C.J.*
1884	11,578	24,874	*O.S.M. Office fixed*
1886	10,493	24,979	
1888	10,713	25,050	*Chandler, Secy. A.S.C.J.*
1890	12,538	30,693	*Broadhurst resigns*
1893	16,683	38,197	*Good trade*
1896	16,816	44,443	
1899	19,682	61,781	
1902	18,364	69,942	*Depression*

Year	*Operative Stone Masons*	*Amalgamated Society of Carp. & Joiners*	*Notes*
1905	15,467	68,177	
1908	10,079	61,220	
1911	8,065	66,365	*Industrial Unionism*
1913	11,056	86,972	
1915	7,925	92,662	*War*
1918	5,669	124,132	*Federation formed*
1919	13,363	136,941	*Peace*

APPENDIX III.—ABBREVIATIONS OF SOCIETIES' NAMES: LIST OF SECRETARIES.

(*a*) List of initials, etc., used in this work. Extinct or absorbed unions are in italics. This list is not exhaustive, but contains all the main unions.

O.B.U.	*Operative Builders' Union* (1833)
B.W.I.U.	Building Workers' Industrial Union
N.F.B.T.O.	National Federation of Building Trade Operatives
O.B.S.	*Operative Bricklayers Society* (London Order)
M.U.O.B. *or* O.S.B. U.O.B.T.A.A.B.S.O.G.B.A.I. U.O.B.T.P.S. F.S.O.B. T.K.B.T.A.B.S. etc.	*Manchester Unity of Operative Bricklayers*, also called *Operative Society of Bricklayers* (1833), and many other names detailed at the end of Chapter ii.
G.B.U.P.A.	*Glasgow Bricklayers United Trade Protecting Association*
O.S.M. F.S.O.S.M.	*Operative Stonemasons* (*General Union*) or *Operative Stonemasons* (*Friendly Society*)
S.O.M. S.U.O.M.	*Scottish* [*United*] *Operative Masons*
O.M.G.W.	*Operative Masons and Graniteworkers*, Aberdeen
B.M.W.A.S.	Building and Monumental Workers' Association of Scotland
A.U.B.T.W.	Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers
A.S.C.J.	*Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners*
G.U.C.J.	*Friendly Society* or *General Union of Carpenters and Joiners*

P.J.S.	*Preston Joiners Society* (1807)
A.C.J.	*Associated Society of Carpenters and Joiners*
A.S.W.	Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers
A.S.W.M.	Amalgamated Society of Woodcutting Machinists
O.U.P.	*Operative United Painters* (1833)
M.A.	*Manchester Alliance of Operative Housepainters*
A.A.O.P.	*Amalgamated Association of Operative Painters* (1860)
G.A.A.H.P.	*General Association of Amalgamated House Painters* (1866)
A.S.H.D.P.	*Amalgamated Society of House Decorators and Painters* (London)
N.A.S.O.H.A.S.P.A.D.	National Amalgamated Society of Operative House and Ship Painters and Decorators.
O.P.G.	*Operative Plumbers and Glaziers* (1833)
F.S.O.P.M.S.T.V.	*Friendly Society of Operative Plumbers of Manchester and Salford and their Vicinities*
U.O.P.A.	*United Operative Plumbers' Association*
U.O.P.A.S.	*United Operative Plumbers' Association of Scotland*
U.O.P.D.E.A.	United Operative Plumbers' and Domestic Engineers' Association
O.F.P.	*Operative F——— Plasterers* (1833)
N.A.O.P.	National Association of Operative Plasterers

S.N.O.P.F.U.	Scottish National Operative Plasterers' Federal Union
U.B.L.U.	*United Builders Labourers Union*
N.B.L.C.W.S.	National Builders' Labourers and Constructional Workers' Society
A.B.L.C.W.S.	"Altogether" Builders' Labourers and Constructional Workers' Society
A.S.S.S.	Amalgamated Slaters' Society of Scotland
A.S.T.P.S.	Amalgamated Slaters' and Tilers' Provident Society
Note Also	
L.B.I.F.	London Building Industries Federation
L.M.B.A.	London Master Builders' Association

(*b*) List of General Secretaries of the main Unions.

OPERATIVE BUILDERS' UNION

John Embleton	1832–1834?

UNITED OPERATIVE PLUMBERS ASSOCIATION:

J. H. Dobb	1866–1868
George May	1868–1873
Wm. Barnett	1873–1879
George B. Cherry	1879–1902
E. E. Burns	1902–1909
J. H. Edmiston	1909–1919
Lachlan MacDonald	1919–

O.B.S.(LONDON ORDER)

Henry Turff	1848–1860
Edwin Coulson	1860–1891
John Batchelor	1891–1919
George Hicks	1919–1921

MANCHESTER UNITY OF OPERATIVE BRICKLAYERS:

[First secretaries unknown]	
Sam Law	? –1844
J. C. Lockett	1844– ?
M. J. O'Neil	? –1868
Geo. Houseley	1868–1890
G. H. Clarke	1890–1914
John Gregory	1914–1921

N.A.O. PLASTERERS:

C. O. Williams	1861–1885
John Knight	1885
Arthur Otley	1885–1896
M. J. Deller	1896–1906
T. H. Otley	1906–1922
A. H. Telling	1922–

AMALGAMATED SOCIETY OF CARPENTERS & JOINERS:

J. Lea	1860–1862
Robert Applegarth	1862–1872
J. D. Prior	1872–1881
J. S. Murchie	1881–1887
Francis Chandler	1887–1919
A. G. Cameron	1919–1920

ASSOCIATED SOCIETY OF CARPENTERS & JOINERS:

W. Matson	1861–1867
W. Paterson	1867– ?
[Unknown]	
W. McIntyre	? –1902
A. Stark	1902–1911

GENERAL UNION OF CARPENTERS & JOINERS:

[First secretaries unknown]	
Robert Last	1862–1876
—Foster	? ?
—Lindsay	? –1883
William Matkin	1883–1920

OPERATIVE STONEMASONS:

George Bevan	1833–1834
Angus McGregor	1834–1836

James Rennie	1836–1838
Thomas Shortt	1838–1843
Thomas Carter	1843–1847
Richard Harnott	1847–1872
James E. Dyer	1872–1883
Wm. Hancock	1883–1910
Wm. Williams	1910–1921

SCOTTISH O.M.

[First unknown]	
J. M'Neill	? –1855
R. Willox	1855–1859
John Paton	1859–1862
Jas. Hart	1862–1866
D. McLaren	1866–1867
Matthew Allan	1867–1883
T. Walker	1883–1885
John Craig	1885–1895
G. B. Craig	1895–1911
W. Gordon	1911–1913
H. Macpherson J. F. Armour	1913–

PAINTERS' SOCIETY (N.A.S.O.H.A.S.P.A.D.):

William Macdonald	? –1866
Thomas Sharples	1866–1890
G. M. Sunley	1890–1910
J. Parsonage	1910–1918
J. A. Gibson	1918–

LONDON AMALGAMATED PAINTERS:

Geo. Shipton	1873–1889
E. C. Gibbs	1889–1904

A.S. WOODCUTTING MACHINISTS:

J. Wild
—Lees
J. Sewell
Thos. Park
W. J. Wentworth

APPENDIX IV.—THE O.B.U. MANIFESTO, 1833.

TEXTUALLY REPRODUCED FROM THE ORIGINAL IN C.U. CORRESPONDENCE.

FRIENDLY DECLARATION

OF THE DELEGATES OF THE LODGES OF THE BUILDING BRANCHES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM, HELD IN MANCHESTER FROM 24 TO THE SEPTEMBER 1833, ADDRESSED TO THEIR FELLOW SUBJECTS THROUGHOUT THE BRITISH DOMINIONS.

After the most mature and grave deliberation in Council among ourselves, we have come to the conclusion that we and you are in false positions and that the real interests of all parties are sacrificed to the errors of those who do not understand the resources of our country or the means of advantageously calling them into action.

Our eyes have been opened upon this subject, we have discovered that our natural and acquired resources are unlimitable and almost inexhaustible and that we and all the industrious classes, have been made the victims of the most lamentable and grievous errors by those who have directed the producing powers of the country. That in consequence we have been kept in ignorance when we might have been made intelligent—reduced to poverty when we might have been made to superabound in riches—divided in our sentiments, feelings and interests when we might have been united in each of them—degraded to the lowest scale in language, habits, condition and public estimation, making us despised and oppressed by all, when we might have been placed in a situation to be highly esteemed, and respected by every other portion of the human race, and when, also, we might have been made far more valuable to our own country and to the population of the world than we have ever yet been or can become while the present errors in directing the resources of the country shall be continued.

It is now evident to us that those who have hitherto advised the Authorities of these realms in devising the Institutions of our country were themselves ignorant of the first principles requisite to be known to establish and maintain a prosperous and superior state of society.

Knowing this and seeing no prospect of any improvement in our condition, being also conscious that our most valuable materials are ignorantly wasted by being senselessly scattered throughout the four quarters of the world and that our industry and skill and unlimitable powers of invention are now most grossly misdirected ; we, without any hostile feelings to the government or any class of persons, have been compelled to come to the conclusion that no party can or will relieve us from the tremendous evils which we suffer and still greater which are coming upon us, until we begin in good earnest to act for ourselves and at once adopt the recommendation of Sir Robert Peel, " to take our own affairs into our own hands."

We have decided to follow this advice and with this view we have formed ourselves into a National Building Guild of Brothers, to enable us to erect buildings of every description upon the most extensive scale in England, Scotland and Ireland.

By the arrangement and organisation which we have adopted we shall accomplish the following important results,

1st.—We shall be enabled to erect all manner of dwellings and other architectural designs for the public more expeditiously, substantially and economically than any Masters can build them under the individual system of competition.

2nd.—We shall be enabled to withdraw all our Brethren of the National Builders Guild and their Families from being a burden upon the public, for they will be supported in old age, infancy, sickness or infirmity of any kind from the general funds of the Guild.

3rd.—None of the Brethren will be unemployed when they desire to work, for when the public do not require their services they will be employed by the Guild to erect superior dwellings and other buildings for themselves, under superior arrangements, that they, their wives and their children may live continuously surrounded by those virtuous external circumstances which alone can form an intelligent, prosperous good and happy population.

4th.—We shall be enabled to determine upon a just and equitable remuneration or wages for the services of the Brethren according to their skill and conduct when employed by the public.

5th.—We shall also be placed in a position to decide upon the amount of work or service to be performed, each day, by the Brethren, in order that none may be oppressed by labour beyond their powers of body or mind.

6th.—We shall be enabled to form arrangements in all parts of the British dominions to re-educate all our adult Brethren that they may enjoy a superior mode of existence, by acquiring new and better dispositions, habits, manners language and conduct, in order that they may become such examples for their children as are requisite to do justice to all young persons whose characters are to be formed to become good practical members of society.

7th.—We shall form arrangements, as soon as circumstances admit, to place all the children of the Brethren, under such instruction of persons and influences of external objects as shall train or educate the *will*, *inclination* and *powers* within each to induce and enable them to become better Architects and Builders of the human character, intellectually and morally, than the world has yet known or even deemed to be practicable.

8th.—We will form arrangements to enable all other classes of Producers of real wealth to unite with us to obtain equal advantages for themselves, their children and their children's children to the end of time.

9th.—We will exhibit to the world, in a plain and simple manner, by our quiet example, how easily the most valuable wealth may be produced in superfluity beyond the wants of the population of all countries; also how beneficially, for the Producing Classes (and all classes will soon perceive their interest on becoming superior producers) the present artificial, inaccurate and therefore injurious circulating medium for the exchange of our riches, may be superseded by an equitable, accurate and therefore rational representation of real wealth, and as a consequence of these important advances in true civilization, how beautifully, yet how accurately the causes which generate the bad passions and all the vices and corruptions attributed to human nature, shall gradually diminish until they all die a natural death and be known no more, except as matter of past history, and thus by contrast, be the cause for everlasting rejoicing.

10th.—We shall by these and other means now easy of adopting speedily open the road to remove the causes of

individual and national competition, of individual and national contests, jealousies and wars, and enable all to discover their true individual interests and thereby establish peace, goodwill and harmony, not only among the Brethren of the Building Guild, but also by their example among the human race for ever.

11th.—We shall secure to the present Masters of all the Building Branches who well understand their business a far more advantageous and secure position in Society than they have or can have under the system of individual competition between Master and Master and Man and Man, and we shall open the way to unite their interests cordially, firmly and permanently with the real body of the National Builders Guild.

12th.—We shall be enabled to exhibit by our new organisation and practical operations, the means by which the individual and general interests of the classes may be united and all be made gradually to become useful members of the great Association for the Emancipation of the Productive Classes.

APPENDIX V.—SOLE SURVIVING CIRCULAR OF THE O.B.U.

At a Meeting of the Members of the Grand Central Committee held in Manchester on Thursday, the 28th day of November, 1833. *Proposed by Brother* RENNIE, *Mason, Seconded by Brother* LITTLE, *Plasterer, that the following MEMORIAL be forwarded to the different District Lodges for their consideration; and that they forward the same to the Lodges in their District.*

Brother LOWRY, *President*—JOHN EMBLETON, *Secretary.*

WE, the Members composing the Grand Central Committee of Manchester, deem it our bounden duty, in the present confused state of our government throughout the Kingdom, to lay before you a plain statement of our difficulties in coming to any decisive measures, as to acting up to the purport of the Rules agreed upon at the last Delegate Meeting. After a laborious inquiry into the state of our affairs in different parts of England, we are obliged to confess, that no regular systematic plans are adopted amongst the Trades in general, to uphold those laws which are established for our guidance.

In order to remedy these difficulties and to adopt some conclusive measure for our future prosperity, we respectfully lay a Programme of our intentions before you, which we deem highly *indispensable*, and by which alone we can carry into effect the principle of sound general government.

We are of opinion that the Law requiring all monies to be sent to the District on strike is wholly inefficient; as it is impossible to make a correct division of the money by sending it according to the present rules; as money is sent to several districts who are on strike at the same period, when some Towns send more money than others, and by these means is unequally divided. To avert this serious evil, we recommend the whole of the money to come through one source, viz., The Grand Central Committee, wherever the seat of government exists. And that all money appropriated for the use of the Turnouts, be paid into the Central Committee of the different Towns where the General Government exists; and them to forward such money to the Grand Central Committee for equal division throughout England, where the Turnouts are situated. And that a regular return of Turnouts be sent to the said

Committee weekly, and that a regular return of payable Members be given to the Grand Lodge Central Committee on the First Tuesday of every month, so that an equal levy be given with accuracy : owing to the gross neglect of the different Districts not sending the amount of Levy passed at the last Delegate Meeting : in them neglecting to give the return of Payable Members : in Lodges taking upon themselves to affix their levies, which has caused anarchy and confusion in those Lodges who do pay the regular stipend. By these neglects, the pay of the Turnouts is upon an average from 4*s*. to 8*s*. per week. And strange to say, this mismanagement has been thrown upon the seat of government, who have been contending with almost insurmountable difficulties, which we cannot remove but by the zealous co-operation of the different Districts, or the Central Committee must cease to exist in Manchester, as the oracle of government. We feel confident that Manchester has done its duty to the present Turnout. If other Towns had paid as well as the bodies we represent, families would not have suffered the privations they have from such miserable pittance received. We unanimously give our decided disapprobation of the conduct of many of the District Lodges for their lukewarm exertions in not supporting our society in the present dilemma and in not endeavouring to ensure the firm stability of general government.

You will take these measures into your consideration, and by adopting and strictly adhering to the same, you will eventually restore that confidence to the Society in general, which is nearly eradicated for want of zealous co-operation.

Signed by *Masons*, George Bevan Secretary, and two others.
Plasterers Edwd. Wolstenholme, Secretary, and two others.
Slaters William Medcalf, Secretary, and two others.
Painters Williams White, Secretary, and two others.
John Embleton, Secretary of the Grand Central Committee.
*Engravers' Arms, Brazennose Street.**

* The signatures, and the rest of the document, are exactly as sent out. Why only four crafts signed is unknown ; perhaps non-attendance at committee meetings was already a disease. The other three crafts had not broken away. It is unlikely that the Lowry was the R. Lowery who was later a prominent Chartist, as the latter was a tailor.

APPENDIX VI.—BRICKLAYERS: LOCKETT'S LETTER, 1855.

Letter to Bolton, one of the Lodges which seceded from the Manchester Order of Bricklayers in 1855. From *A Reply*, page 20–22.

Manchester, January 17th, 1855.

To the Bolton Branch
Of the Liverpool Committee of Management.

GENTLEMEN,

We take the earliest opportunity of acknowledging your letter of the 16th instant, in which you kindly inform us of your secession from the society, and of your suspension of payments on account of tramps' relief; you invite our immediate attention to providing for a continuation of tramp relief to our members. Your requests were scarcely made ere they were acceded to, and it will afford you gratification, that at the very close of our connection your least desire had only to be expressed to be gratified.

We cannot part with you as old friends without reciprocating your valedictory address, and only that you are possessed of that dogged and convenient pertinacity which is at all times armed against conviction, and deaf to all reason, we would make one last appeal to what remains of your understanding against your stubborn resistance of truth, and the stolid stupidity that renders you incapable of judging of events, only through the medium of your own mean and false prejudices, most clumsily disguised in pretended solicitude for the regeneration and the welfare of society. Belonging as you do, to a class who proverbially require *long memories*, you have rendered yourselves conspicuously deficient in the natural gift which is so necessary to the successful pursuit of that avocation; you are alike inaccessible by reason, and impenetrable to shame; hardened and practised in the great enormity of lying, you have imposed upon yourselves the belief that others like you are incapable of giving expression to truth. You have the temerity and the audacity to assert that the notice in the last report of the unanimous consent of all the lodges who had forwarded opinions, "is a dishonourable and bad excuse;" what was then stated was true,

is so still, and you cannot controvert it. If you dare again encounter the mortification of disappointment, write again to the lodges as you did before when your jealous suspicion was aroused upon your notable propositions for tinkering some of the rules of the society. It might prove a profitable investment for the "three shillings which you have retained in hand for future postages." If you succeed in detecting us, see what honour awaits you—if you fail, why you are already sunk so low, that further degradation is scarcely possible.

We dismiss your hallucination "that the members of Bolton is fined for bringing your dishonourable actions to light," as the most consummate and self-inflicted piece of humbug within our recollection; it may be creditable to your penetration and ingenuity to affect such an interpretation, but it is less than wise to acknowledge it, since you may have to pay for both offences ; be assured that at present you only stand fined *for* NOT *being able* to bring our dishonourable transactions to light, after charging us therewith. We can only notice briefly your infatuation, "that you had the right of selecting your own mode for trying the dispute between us." There is neither choice for you or ourselves in such matters beyond what the laws of the society provide. We were bound by duty, and so were you doubly so, first by the rules of the society, and secondly by the immaculate article, No. 29, of the rules, which the collective wisdom of your delegate meeting did not alter ; you will find that you are not consistent even in your inconsistency. However, doubt not but what you have been tried by the proper tribunal! doubtless that you have been found guilty, convicted, disgraced, and punished! And doubt least of all, that this expression on the part of the society is too powerful to be resisted, and too just to be despised.

As a final attempt to cover your flagrancy, and justify in ever so small a degree your promise "*to remove the veil*," you have shifted your ground when it was no longer tenable, and you have taken up another position ; you now condescend to tear away the flimsy pretence and yield to the persuasive force of the "two pound penalty," that which you refused at the expensive entertainment which you got up for your dupes in September last ; you now allege that the crime and offence committed by

ourselves took place so long ago as the year 1851, so after bottling up your indignation for four long years, your solicitude for the "regeneration of the society," and your dutiful regard for the interests of its members has now induced your very reluctant exposure. We hope that we are your only confidants in this present discovery, if so, as you value your reputation, keep it within that limit; *we* may perhaps in compliment believe you, no one else can. Your superiors at Liverpool know from your own promptings most of your bad qualities; you have taken especial pains to put them up to your knavery; let well alone, and take no further trouble to let them know you as fools! There is perhaps a merit in telling a lie and sticking to it, but the mere trick of shifting from one lie to another is for the tyro and unworthy old adepts like yourselves. Besides, you are speaking against your card in fixing the date of this offence in '51. Your much respected confrères at Liverpool never authorised this, for if we are guilty in that instance, the members of Liverpool are equally so, and so are all the other lodges, for nearly all voted in favour of this proposition that the advance of salary should take place from that time—January, 1851. We did not raise this salary—we did not vote for it one time or the other, and herein you find your mare's nest.

Following the bent of your unfortunate infirmity, you asseverate "that we have spent a large sum of money in an attempt to add numbers to the society." Our answer to this may be found in the following facts:—Before we commenced spending money on this account, the number of lodges in this society amounted to *fifteen*, the number of members was less than *five hundred*. Since that time we have reported *thirty-two* lodges in society, and have in one month returned *two thousand and seventy* members. We have more than doubled the number of lodges, and more than quadrupled the number of members, besides we have saved an accumulating fund now amounting to upwards of *two thousand five hundred pounds*. This is an excess of receipt over expenditure, and guarantees us as being capable of meeting our engagements for the next five years at least, supposing the expenses to be equal to that of the last five years, and this, too, without calculating upon the receipt of one penny of

contribution from any member during that time, so that to assert the attempt of increasing the members has been a failure is to prove that the force of lying can no further go.

You ask " what has become of Leicester ? " Come over here, and if you can believe the evidence of your own eyes we will show you as much evidence as will convince you that you know as little of this matter as you do of any other. You also ask " what we have done for Sheffield ? " Reports greatly belie one of your colleagues; if he can't tell you *why* the members of Sheffield are in their present position, and *who* contributed thereto, he need not disclose his participation in that unfortunate affair; others have done that for him. None but the very elite of Bolton have ever suspected us of any share in that calamity. You speak of " having documents in your possession in the handwriting of the general secretary, given under our sanction and authority, to prove all these assertions." Why not produce them ? Because it is the inveteracy of lying ! Why you would give each, one of your ears for as much of a document as would give a colourable pretence for one tithe part of what you have been convicted upon. *None* know better than ourselves *what you have not got*. *Few* know better than ourselves of *what you have got;* we are more in your confidence than you suspect, we shall still continue to be so, and always have at least one eye upon most of your doings.

We must now dismiss you to the companionship of your parent at Liverpool—like will draw to like—but surely your ambition is scarcely advanced by your subordinate appointment of " Branch of the Liverpool Committee of Management," and apart from the honour and satisfaction of being able to nominate and elect without opposition your Executive Council. You have lost caste. " One hen with one chick " and the happy family, happily illustrated. Have a care you do not *too soon* verify the proverb of the Kilkenny cats, and eat each other up to the stumps of your tails.

Up to this point your pursuit in the great game got up for your especial aggrandisement has been a most signal and complete failure. If your physical influences are not as debased as your moral ones, you may yet gull your present partners and associates, and with a discreet use of your " peculiar propensity " add lustre and profit to your new speculation.

Without thanking you for any part of what you leave behind since *you did your best to take it with you*, be assured nevertheless that we shall at all times feel much pleasure in subscribing ourselves,

Your most faithful friends,

THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL.

JAMES CHARLES LOCKETT, *Secretary.*

APPENDIX VII.—INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM: SYLLABUS OF LECTURE ISSUED 1912.

OPERATIVE BRICKLAYERS' SOCIETY.

Consolidation Committee

SYLLABUS OF LECTURE

FOR THE

INDUSTRIAL UNION OF BUILDING WORKERS

INTRODUCTION

A The historic roles of the worker :—
1 Slavery,
2 Serfdom,
3 Wage-Labour.

B The development of the productivity of Labour through systematic co-operation in the workshop.
1 Handicraft,
2 Manufacture,
3 Machinery.

C The results of co-operation in production continue to be enjoyed by the capitalist class, through lack of co-operation among the workers, for the purposes of resistance and restitution.

THE CAUSE OF THE ORGANISATION OF LABOUR

A The cause is to be found in the relations of production.

B The requirements of production being :—

LABOUR	MEANS OF PRODUCTION
When the Labourer becomes divorced from the means of production, becomes :	When they cease to be the property of the producer and are owned by a class of non-producers, becomes :

C

WAGE-LABOUR	CAPITAL

1 The organisation of Wage Labour originates in the antagonism existing between :—

WAGE-LABOUR AND CAPITAL

2 The value produced by a day's labour is divided into :—

WAGES	PROFITS
(Labour which is paid for)	(Labour which is unpaid)

3 *Rise in Wages—Fall in Profits (Decreased Exploitation).
Fall in Wages—Rise in Profits (Increased Exploitation).

4 No identity of interest between
WAGE-LABOURERS AND CAPITALISTS

5 General tendency is to decrease Wages and to increase Profits.

D Factors that make for :—

(Decreased) WAGES	AND	(Increased) PROFITS
1 Development of Machinery :		Such as Mortising and Moulding Machines, Diamond Cutters, Scotch Cranes, Concrete Mixers, etc., etc.
2 Development of New Material :		Such as Steel Construction, Concrete Casing with Asphalt Roofing, Partition Slabs cast with Finished Face, etc., etc.

3 Development of Combines, Trusts, Joint Stock Companies, Limited Companies, and so on to economise working expenditure.

RESULTS.

Diminishing Demand for Labour, Disappearance of Market for Skilled Artisans, Speeding up. } Increased Competition } Fall in Wages.

* Note.—We deal here with the mass.

THE PRESENT FORM OF ORGANISATION

A The craft form of Labour organisation arose before machinery had seized hold of production, when the tool of the handicraftsman was still the predominating instrument. It corresponds to the handsaw, and the handplane. It found the sphere of its usefulness in a market where there existed a considerable demand for skilled labour.

B To-day this form of organisation becomes more and more inadequate to even prevent a decrease in wages or a general decline of one-time relatively favourable conditions.

C Because the tool formerly wielded by the handicraftsman is now fitted into an iron body, driven by steam, or gas, or electricity.

Because the material formerly requiring the skilled labourer for its preparation and fitting is now substituted by material that can be handled by (so-called) unskilled labourers—*e.g.*, reinforced concrete as substitute for brick and stone buildings, for partition building, for brick and stone arch, etc.

The work falling within the domain of skilled labour is a vanishing quantity. The market for skilled labour rapidly declines.

D The persistence of a form of organisation after the conditions of its usefulness have disappeared constitutes a fetter on the workers' efforts, a barrier to their advancement.

1 Craft Strikes—more and more helpless failure.

2 Conciliation
3 Arbitration

} After many years of working these agencies we find them incapable of improving our material position as a class.

4 Agreements—which work against the worker.

5 Giving Long Notices—which gives the employer an opportunity to prepare himself against attack, and so impede our chances of early success.

E The craft method creates suffering and inconvenience and brings little advance. Wanted, a form of organisation and method which decreases the inconvenience and results in gain.

THE FORM OF ORGANISATION REQUIRED

A The industrial form of organisation alone compatible with industrial development and alone able to secure united action for common interests.

1 All the workers in one industry in one union.
2 All the industrial unions in one organisation.

B 1 Ultimate object : Control of industry in the interest of the community.
2 Immediate objects : To secure a larger part of the product of Labour by :—

REDUCTION OF HOURS RISE IN WAGES

This is to be accompanied by an increasing control of industry in the shape of an increasing power of determining and regulating the general conditions under which the work is done.

C Abolition of sectional strikes, and of strikes on petty issues. The saving in time, energy, and money resulting in :

Disappearance of Arbitration Machinery,
Disappearance of Contracts,
Disappearance of Notices.

The effect of this upon the workers would be conservation of strength, the disappearance of non-unionism, shortening of duration of strikes through widening of strike area.

D Constitution of "The Building Workers' Industrial Union" :—

1 A recognition of clashing interests between

WORKER AND EMPLOYER

2 Admitting to membership all wage-workers engaged in Building Industry.

E Policy of the Union :—

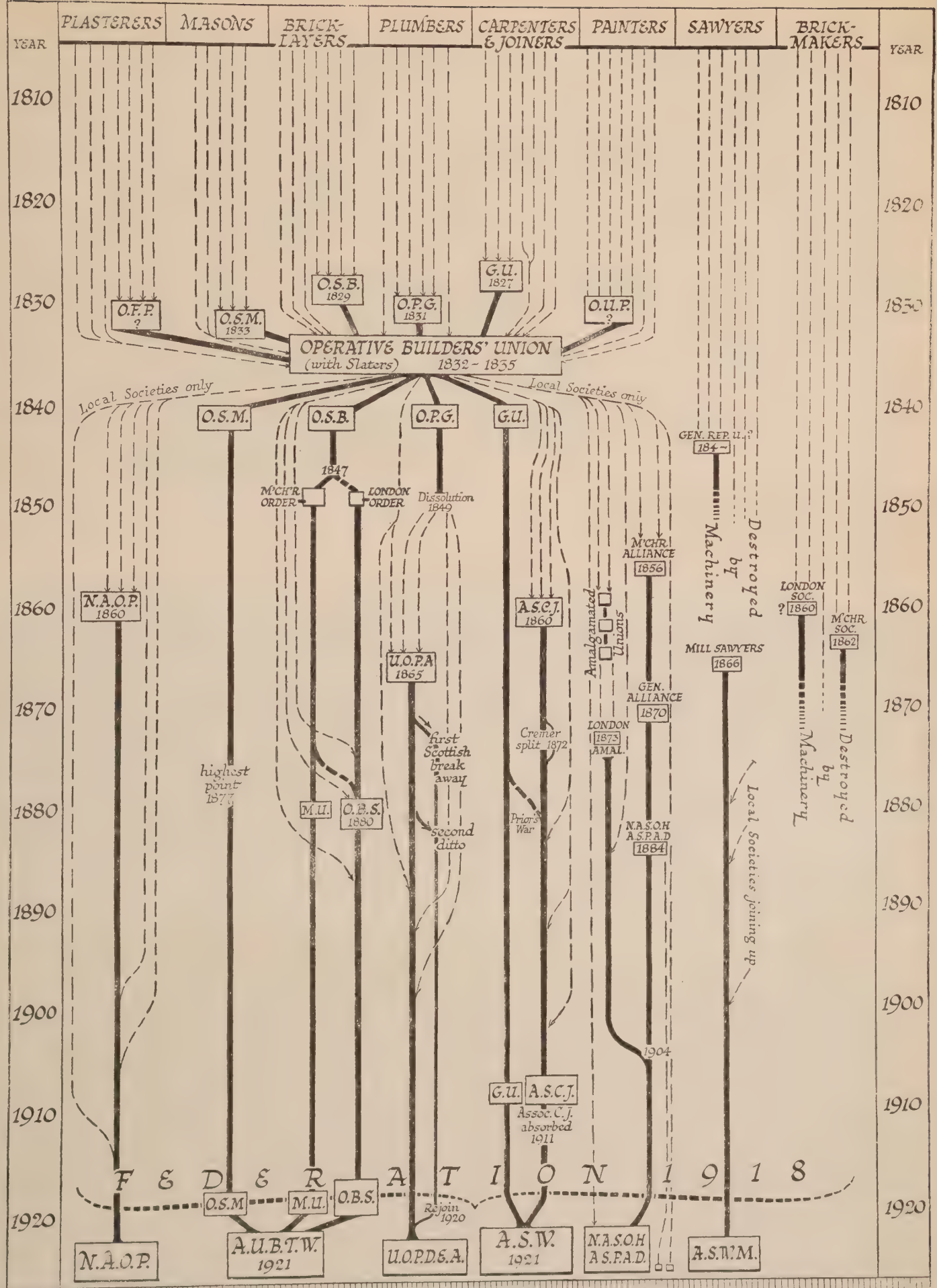
1 To maintain a fighting force, working always to improve the material conditions of the workers engaged therein.
2 To act in conjunction with other similar unions in the interest of the whole working class.

CONCLUSION

What Co-operation has done for the production of wealth Co-operation will do for the restitution of wealth to the producers.

(*Signed*),

H. J. ADAMS — J. V. WILLS
JAMES LANE — WALTER DAVIES
BENJAMIN T. AMES.
GEORGE HICKS, *Chairman.*
JOHN BATCHELOR, *Secretary.*



THE CHART

drawn by J.F. Horrabin from material supplied by R.W. Postgate

NOTE: English Craft Societies only shown. Slaters omitted for lack of room, & Builders' Labourers & Scottish Societies because of their complexity. (For meaning of abbreviations see Appendix)

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